The HUNNIWELL BOYS in the CARIBBEAN

L. P. WYMAN

(101)- SHJ

There was a sudden flash of white as the huge fish turned

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THE HUNNIWELL BOYS IN THE CARIBBEAN

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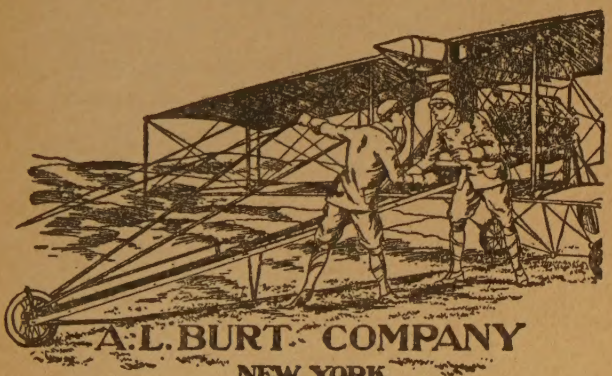
AUTHOR *of*

"The Hunniwell Boys in the Air," "The Hunniwell Boys' Victory," "The Hunniwell Boys and the Platinum Mystery," "The Hunniwell Boys in the Secret Service," "The Hunniwell Boys' Longest Flight," "The Hunniwell Boys in the Gobi Desert," "The Lakewood Boys Series," "The Golden Boys Series," etc.



A. L. BURT COMPANY
NEW YORK

THE HUNNIWELL BOYS SERIES

THRILLING AVIATION STORIES
For Boys 12 to 16 Years
By L. P. WYMAN, Ph.D.

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The Hunniwell Boys' Victory
The Hunniwell Boys in the Secret Service
The Hunniwell Boys and the Platinum Mystery
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CHAPTER I

A LETTER FROM CUBA

Gordon Hunniwell stretched lazily and raised his head from the hammock just as his brother, Jim, drove into the yard.

"Any mail?" he shouted as Jim jammed on the brakes and brought the car to a halt. Then, before Jim could answer, he added: "Don't you know that brake linings cost money? That's no way to stop a car."

"I know it," Jim grinned as he jumped to the ground. "If you'd spend a little time in keeping that old mess of junk of yours that you call a car in order I wouldn't have to use the brakes so much. That accelerator sticks so that it needs a double compound lever to pull it up every

time you step on it. But I suppose you'd rather loll in that hammock."

"It doesn't stick with me," Gordon reminded him. "But then I know how to drive a car, and that makes a difference. But you didn't answer my original question. Did you get any mail?"

"Three or four letters for Father and a letter for us from Slim Togus."

"Slim Togus? Where's Fred now?"

"I haven't read it but it's postmarked Havana."

"Havana? Wonder what he's doing down there."

"Doesn't his father own a sugar plantation or something or other?"

"Seems to me he does, but, perhaps, if you read the letter we'll know more about it."

"Gee, but I never thought of that. Your tongue goes so that when you're talking a body doesn't have a chance to get in a thought edgewise."

Jim had slit the envelope while talking and started to read the letter as Gordon got out of the hammock.

"What's the idea of all the solo stuff?" he demanded. "I thought you said that letter was to us."

"Oh, pardon me, you are here, aren't you? I'll read it aloud. It begins, 'Dear Youngsters'."

"Can you beat it?" Gordon snorted. "Just because Fred's a year older than you he thinks we're children. Honestly, he makes me tired. But why don't you go on?"

"Why don't you keep that mouth of yours still long enough to let me?"

"I'm dumb. Go on."

"See that you are. Now I'll start all over again.

" 'Dear Youngsters:

" 'I suppose you'll be surprised to get a letter from me from away down here, but you're getting it just the same. I've been here two weeks. You know my father owns a sugar plantation down here and this is the first time I've ever been here, so I'm getting lots of kicks out of it. I'm a regular walking encyclopedia on the sugar industry.

" 'But that isn't why I'm writing to you. I've struck the biggest thing in my life down here and I want you both to hop in that plane you've told me so much about and head for Havana just as quick as you can. If what you've told me about the plane is true you can make it in

about ten minutes' or perhaps a little less flying time.

" 'Our plantation is about fifty miles from the city directly east and sets on a high hill, and you can't miss it, because there isn't another house within thirty miles of it. I'm not going to tell you what it's all about till you get here, but if you want the time of your lives and lots of thrills and adventures you don't want to lose any time getting here, and I don't mean maybe.

" 'Yours expectantly,

" 'SLIM.

" 'P.S.—Don't fail to come.' "

"Is that all?" Gordon demanded as he finished reading.

"That's all and I'd say it was enough," Jim laughed as he refolded the letter and put it back in the envelope.

"But what do you suppose he wants of us?"

"That's easy, he wants us to come down there, or at least, that's what I gathered from the letter."

"Smarty. But what for?"

"Now you're in the realm of uncertainty. Perhaps he's discovered a new kind of a clam.

You know he's always talking about that sort of thing."

"Not much of an adventure about that, but when Fred gets excited it's usually over something worth while, so I guess we'd better go."

"Think so?"

"Don't you?"

"Well, I suppose we might as well. It isn't very far, not more than eighteen or nineteen hundred miles."

"About eighteen hours, eh?"

"Maybe."

"Well, it's most dinnertime and we'll spring it on the folks after we eat and see what they have to say. The *Falcon* is in good trim, isn't it?"

"Prime, I went all over her yesterday."

The *Falcon,* an airplane built by Jim and Gordon Hunniwell, at their home in Skowhegan, Maine, was a unique machine. Built much on the regulation lines so far as the structure was concerned, it differed in that it was powered by an electric motor instead of a gas engine. The motor derived its energy from a new type of storage battery which had been invented by two boys of the same town, and intimate friends of theirs, Bob and Jack Golden. These cells were only a few inches long and very light but they

were powerful enough to do the work of many cells of the ordinary type.

In addition the *Falcon* was equipped with a horizontal propeller which, because of the extreme lightness of the plane, was easily capable of lifting it vertically. This propeller was powered by a separate motor so that both propellers could be used at the same time or separately. Thus they could fly the plane at any desired speed from nothing up to a hundred and seventy miles an hour. The elevator, as they called the horizontal propeller, would lift the plane easily with three passengers and had done it with four.

"Cuba, eh?" Mr. Hunniwell mused after Jim had read the letter to the family. "And you have no idea as to what he's discovered?"

"Not a bit, sir," Jim replied.

"You want to go?"

"We'd like to if you have no objections," Jim told him.

"How about it, Mother?" Mr. Hunniwell asked, turning to his wife.

"Well, I suppose they'll go somewhere," Mrs. Hunniwell smiled.

"And it might as well be there as anywhere else, eh?" Mr. Hunniwell laughed.

"But they've got to promise not to get into any trouble," she told them.

"As if we ever do," Gordon laughed.

"But I'll say one thing for them," Mrs. Hunniwell smiled, "They're like a cat and always seem to land on their feet."

"But there may come a time when they won't," Mrs. Hunniwell said, a bit sadly.

"Let's hope that will be a long time off," Jim said as he got up and kissed her.

"When will you start?" their father asked as they all got up from the table.

"Fred seemed to want us to hurry, so we thought we'd get away to-morrow morning. We figure that it'll take us somewhere around eighteen hours, so we thought we'd get down in Florida before dark and stay there all night, and then fly over the island the next morning," Jim explained.

"Can you get ready in so short a time?"

"Yes, sir. You see, the plane's all ready now and we don't intend to take much stuff with us. Likely we'll be back in a few days."

"More likely to be a few weeks judging from your previous trips," his father smiled.

The afternoon was a busy one for the boys and the time passed quickly, as it always does when one has a lot to do, and in spite of Jim's

assertion that they could get ready in a short time they found many things to attend to. But by suppertime they were all ready for an early start the following morning.

Morning came bright and clear and by half-past five they had finished breakfast and there was nothing to keep them from starting. Mr. and Mrs. Hunniwell, despite their protests, had insisted in getting up in time to see them off, and their last words were to be very careful and let them hear from them as often as possible.

"Now don't you worry," Jim ordered as he turned the current into the elevator motor.

Faster and faster turned the blades until, with a slight lurch, the plane left the ground. Jim waited until they were about a thousand feet in the air and then started the other motor and as the forward propeller gathered speed he shut off the elevator and swung the plane toward the southwest. It was early in July, and although it would be warm later in the day, the morning air was crisp and cool and they were glad that they were dressed warmly.

"Gee, but it's good to be alive," Gordon declared as the plane straightened out on its course.

"It's not so bad," Jim agreed, adding another

notch to their speed. "There, she's hitting about a hundred and fifty and I reckon we'll let her ride at that."

One hundred and fifty miles an hour was their regular flying speed and they seldom increased it unless there was a necessity. Three-quarters of an hour after starting they passed over Portland at an altitude of a thousand feet and headed down the coast, as they never flew for any great distance over water if they could avoid it. Not that they considered it unsafe, but they were very careful and knew that they were safer over the land. Undoubtedly the *Falcon* was the safest plane ever built, as either propeller would keep it in the air, and there was little likelihood that both motors would fail them at the same time. Still they realized that it was possible and they took no chances which could be avoided.

"That must be Boston," Gordon announced about three-quarters of an hour later, as a large city appeared in the distance.

"Unless they've moved it it is," Jim told him.

It was shortly before noon when Gordon spied a dark cloud rising rapidly in the west. They were flying over Georgia at the time and the motor was working perfectly.

"Thunder storm coming off there," he announced pointing toward the west.

"Looks very much like it," Jim agreed. "But we may out-run it. Looks to me as though it would pass behind us."

But for the past two hours they had been bucking a strong head wind and their speed had been reduced accordingly. And the storm was coming toward them with great rapidity, and even as Jim spoke the rumble of distant thunder reached their ears. Three minutes later they could hear it very plainly as the motor made hardly any sound.

"We're running right into it," Gordon declared.

"Right. I guess we'd better try and go over it," Jim replied as he gave the stick a pull.

Up shot the plane at a sharp incline, but he had not acted quickly enough, for a blinding flash of lightning with an almost simultaneous crack of thunder nearly blinded and deafened them.

"Pretty close that," Gordon shouted.

"I'll tell the world," Jim called back.

But Gordon did not catch the words, for another flash came and another snap of thunder followed it so closely that they knew it was close. Jim was still pointing the plane upward

as steeply as he dared hoping to climb above the storm before it should be struck. Another flash came before the echo of the previous clap had died away, but Jim sensed that it came from below them and an instant later the plane shot out from the cloud and into clear sky.

"Whew, but I didn't like that," Gordon gasped.

"It was a bit thick and that's a fact," Jim agreed, as he straightened the plane out to an even keel. "That second clap wasn't a mile away, let me tell you."

"And it's still raging down there," Gordon said looking over the side of the cockpit. "I'd sure hate to be in it."

"Yep, I guess it's safer up here. A whack from one of those bolts would knock us galley-west so quick we'd never know what hit us. But we're leaving it behind now."

Shortly after six o'clock Gordon suggested that instead of landing near a city and going to a hotel they camp out for the night.

"It's more trouble finding a place to stow the plane and hunting up a hotel than it's worth in this kind of weather. We've got plenty of food and I'll get you up a supper that'll make your mouth water," he said pointing downward and off to their right. "There's a good looking place

right over there by that pine woods. What do you say?"

"Suits me," Jim told him as he turned the wheel and pushed the stick, heading the plane downward.

They had reached the border of Florida and it was very warm and the idea of sleeping out in the open appealed to both of them, and they knew from much experience that nothing made a better bed than a thick layer of pine needles. It was a secluded spot where they landed and the air was heavy with the fragrance of the pine.

"You know, Jim, I'd like the experience of flying all day sometime and not having a thing happen," Gordon declared as he set about building a fire. "Seems like we are always running into thunder storms or hail storms or—"

"Or something else," Jim laughingly interrupted.

"Exactly. Oh, well, variety, they say, is the spice of life and I suppose it would get monotonous if nothing ever happened."

Gordon was picking up some bits of wood close to a small but thick clump of bushes when a sound like a lot of dried peas being shaken in a paste-board box made him spring back so

quickly that his heel caught on a root and he fell over backward flat on his back.

"Here with your gun, Jim," he called. "There's a side-winder in these bushes and it's a big one."

"Did you see him?" Jim asked as he came running, his automatic in his hand.

"No, but I heard him, and, believe me, he's got a rattle what am a rattle. Listen."

He picked up a piece of wood and threw it into the clump and instantly the sound told them that the snake was there. Jim stepped forward and an instant later fired.

"Got him," he cried, and dragged out a rattlesnake fully six feet long and nearly as big around as his thigh.

"He's a hunny, all right," Gordon declared. "One nip from him and good night. Hope there aren't any more like him around."

For a few minutes they threw bits of wood into the clump of bushes but there was no evidence of another snake and they concluded that it had been alone.

"We'll skin him after supper," Jim said as he looked down at the snake. "That skin'll make a dandy belt or a pair of moccasins. You don't often get them any larger than that fellow."

Supper was ready after what Jim declared was long enough to get a dozen meals, and then, by the time they had cleaned up and had taken the skin from the snake, it was dark and they both agreed that they were tired enough to go to sleep without, as Gordon said, being rocked to sleep.

"Gee, but I hope nothing happens to-night," Jim said sleepily as he rolled himself in his blanket.

"Don't call me if it does," Gordon answered.

CHAPTER II

MAKING PLANS

"I THINK I see it."

It was shortly before noon the following day and the *Falcon* was heading east over the island of Cuba, when Gordon made the announcement.

"Off there to the right a bit?" Jim asked as he gave the wheel a slight turn.

"Yep, on that high hill, mountain I suppose they call it down here. Anyhow we're about fifty miles from Havana and it's the first large place we've seen since leaving the outskirts of the city."

"I guess it's the place all right and anyhow we'll make a landing and find out."

"It's the place all right," Gordon asserted as, a few minutes later, the plane hovered over the low rambling building. "There's Slim waving at us."

As the plane reached the ground, on a large level stretch in front of the house, they were greeted by a boy of about their own age but

who sadly belied the name of Slim. Fred Togus stood five feet and four inches in his shoes and weighed close to one hundred and fifty pounds, but as long as the boys had known him, he had been called Slim. As is usually the case with fat boys Slim was jolly and the best of company but he was a marked exception in that he was a very brilliant student. At college he stood very near, if not at, the head of his class and he always won the place with very little effort. Also he was of an inventive turn and was always fussing around with machines.

"I thought that letter would bring you," he smiled as he shook hands with them.

"What's it all about?" Gordon asked him.

"You'll not find out a thing till after dinner," Slim told him. "But it won't be long as we eat at twelve and it's almost that now."

"You can't make me mad with any such statement as that," Gordon assured him.

"I guess Slim knows you well enough to know that," Jim declared as he gazed at the wonderful view from the hill. "I say, old man, you've got some view here," he added, turning to Slim.

"It's not so bad when you get used to it," Slim told him. "Here comes Father and I want you to meet him."

Mr. Togus was a man built on much the same plan as his son but a little taller. The boys had never met him but were at once won by his cordial welcome and hearty manner in greeting them.

"I've heard so much about you from Fred," he told them, "that it seems as though I'd always known you. I warn you you'll have to go some to live up to what he's said about you," he added with a twinkle in his eye."

"I hope that he hasn't too greatly overrated us, sir," Jim said.

"You bet I haven't," Slim broke in.

Just then the dinner bell rang and they all moved toward the house.

"That gives you just five minutes to get washed up," Slim told them as they mounted the steps. "Think you can make it?"

"Watch our smoke," Gordon laughed.

They met Fred's mother a few minutes later in the dining-room and her greeting was no less cordial than had been that of the others. Mrs. Togus was as slight as her husband was stout, as Gordon put it to Jim a little later, but she was no less jolly and the boys liked her at once.

"Fred has been like a fish out of water these last few days and if you hadn't come when you

did I don't know what would have happened," she told them, as they sat down at the table.

"But I'm as still as a dead fish now," Fred laughed. "Jim and Gordon always have a soothing effect on me."

"Then I guess we'd better keep them here all the time," Mr. Togus laughed. "If they can keep you out of mischief it's more than your mother or I can do."

When dinner was finished Fred took the boys out back of the house and led them to a small building about a hundred yards distant.

"This is my work shop," he told them as they entered.

"And I'd say it was some shop," Gordon declared as he glanced about the room.

And little wonder, for it was nothing less than a well equipped machine shop. In a few minutes they had examined all the different machines and equipment and expressed their wonder at its completeness.

"Now I suppose you'd like to know why I sent you that letter that got you down here in such a hurry," Slim said as they sat on the steps outside the door of the shop.

"Well, you've taken your time so far in telling us about it, and I don't know that a week

or two more or less will make any difference now," Gordon told him.

"I reckon I know how you feel about it," Slim began, "but, you see, it's a long story and I wanted to wait till I had time."

"Meaning that you're going to shoot now?" Gordon asked.

"Right. Now you listen and after I get through you can ask all the questions you wish."

"We're listening," Gordon assured him as he paused.

"Once upon a time, that's the way all stories should begin, you know, there was a pirate who was known far and wide—"

"How wide?" Gordon interrupted.

"Keep that trap of yours closed and let him tell his story, will you?" Jim said. "What's the matter with you?"

"Who was known far and wide by the name of Black Henri," Slim continued.

"Did the adjective apply to the color of his skin or to the enormity of his deeds?" Gordon asked.

"I don't know, but if you don't keep—"

"He will," Jim promised placing a hand over Gordon's mouth. "If he speaks again before you get through I'll gag him."

"All right, on those conditions I'll go on. Black Henri sailed these seas about—"

"Which seas?" Gordon demanded before Jim could act.

"The Caribbean Sea," Slim said with a slight smile." He sailed the sea as aforesaid about a hundred and twenty or twenty-five years ago, and he was a holy terror if report be true. He had a powerful gang of cutthroats and the fastest ship which ever sailed these waters. He was a ruthless pirate all right, but there is more than a touch of the romantic which has come down regarding him. He never, so the legend goes, harmed a woman, and if there were women on any ship captured by him they were treated with the greatest respect and were landed unharmed at the first opportunity.

"Of course many stories have been told regarding his activities and no doubt many of them are pure fiction, but it is certain that there was such a man and that he was very successful at his trade and accumulated a vast amount of booty, money, jewels and—"

"Pieces of eight," Gordon interrupted.

"You'll be in more than eight pieces if you don't keep still," Jim threatened.

"Just one question and I'll not say another word," Gordon pleaded.

"Let him ask it," Slim agreed.

"What I want to ask is if you've got us down here to chase him."

"Shall I gag him?" Jim demanded.

"No, we'll have to humor him," Slim said, his face as sober as a judge. "It's easy to see that he's not right in his mind. No, sonny, I didn't bring you down here to catch him. He's been dead a number of years, quite a number as a matter of fact."

"Oh, I see," Gordon said slowly. "Probably it was for some other reason then."

"To resume the story," Slim went on, "Black Henri was hunted for by many ships and enormous rewards were offered for his capture dead or alive, but he was never caught. It was commonly reported that he was in league with the devil and that his satanic majesty protected him. At any rate he prospered and waxed richer and richer as the years went by. And—"

"I like that word waxed," Gordon interrupted.

"And," Slim went on without heeding the interruption, " 'tis said that he kept the most of his booty on board the ship. By the way, his ship was named, *The Black Gull,* and flew a large white flag with a black gull painted on it.

Many times they had him all but captured but every time he slipped away unharmed and continued his merry way.

"But, as there comes an end to all things, so there finally came an end to Black Henri and *The Black Gull.* But it was not by the hand of man that he reached his end. One day, so the report goes, *The Black Gull* was struck by a bolt of lightning and burned and sank with all the crew on board. Why they didn't take to the small boats and escape has never, so far as I can learn, been explained."

"Interesting if true," Gordon declared as Slim paused for a moment.

"Interesting whether true or not, I'd say," Jim added.

"Still, I don't quite see what it's all got to do with us," Gordon persisted.

"You wouldn't—yet," Slim told him.

"Oh, your story isn't done then?" Gordon asked.

"No, it isn't done by considerable. Indeed I might say it has only begun," Slim told him.

"Meaning there's more to follow," Jim explained turning to Gordon with a smile of pity.

"I gathered that much," Gordon told him.

"Now comes the most interesting part so far

as we're concerned," Slim continued. "About a thousand miles to the east of here there's a small island by the name of Basse Terre and it has always been believed by the natives that it was just off the coast of that island that *The Black Gull* went down. Now Father has an old negro who used to work for him and he lets him live in a little house about a mile from here back in the woods. He's no one knows how old but he must be over a hundred. He says he's most a hundred and fifty, but I suppose that's not true, but he is very old, there's no doubt about that. And he has a wonderful memory or a very vivid imagination, I don't know which. Anyhow he tells some wonderful stories about things which happened a long time ago.

"Well, about a week ago I was talking with him in his little home—by the way, he likes to have me come and see him—and he told me that his father was a member of Black Henri's crew, and he said that he was on *The Black Gull* when it burned."

"But I thought you said that all the crew was lost," Jim said.

"That's what the reports said, but Old Joe, that's the darkie's name, sticks to it that his father swam ashore and was the only one

saved. He says that his father told him all about it and that the ship went down in a place where the water is not more than eight or ten fathoms deep. He claims that he knows the exact spot and he showed me an old map which marks it."

"I think I begin to see a mouse," Gordon declared. "I suppose it's your idea that we're going to find the wreck."

"Well, I thought something of the sort," Slim acknowledged.

"But wouldn't it all be broken up and washed away long before this?" Jim asked.

"Perhaps and perhaps not," Slim told them. "I asked Old Joe that very question and he says that the timbers they used to build ships in those days will last hundreds of years under water, but I don't suppose he knows much about it. But I thought we could have a lot of fun and excitement out of it."

"How about your father and mother? Do they approve of it?" Jim asked.

"Well, to tell the truth, I haven't said anything to them about it yet. You see, I kind of thought it would be best to wait till you were here so I could have your moral support. They think I'm inclined to be rash, I guess, but if you back me up I don't think they'll mind."

"We'll back you up all right," Gordon assured him, but Jim hesitated.

"Seems to me we ought to know a lot more about it before we make up our minds," he gave as his opinion. "Tell us what your plans are."

"Well, for one thing, I've been working for some time on a new type of diving suit and have had a couple of them made by a firm in Boston. They came the other day."

"What are they like?" Jim asked.

"They look much like the regular thing but air is supplied from cylinders of compressed air which are carried in the top of the helmet so no pump is necessary. And there's another innovation which I hope is going to work out all right but I haven't tried it yet. You see the suit, or a good part of it, fits loosely and a cylinder of compressed air is to be carried in such a way that it can be opened easily and fill the suit with air, blow it up in other words, and make the whole outfit light enough so that it'll come to the surface."

"I'll say that's some idea," Gordon declared. "You won't need any hose or any rope at all."

"That's my idea exactly," Slim assured them.

"It sounds all right," Jim mused, "but you never can tell about those things until they're tried out."

"We're able to try 'em aren't we?" Gordon demanded.

"Sure we can," Jim told him, "and I believe it'll work all right."

"Of course it will," Gordon declared.

"Now, one or two more questions," Jim continued. "How far from the shore is this spot?"

"About a mile according to what Joe says, and the map bears him out," Slim told him.

"Wouldn't we need a boat to dive from?"

"Sure we would, and I've got that problem all solved. You see I've got a fifty foot boat with a four cylinder engine in her capable of making twenty-five miles an hour, and she's very seaworthy. Got a twenty-five foot cabin and a galley and everything. We could live a month on her."

"Where is she?" Jim asked.

"Around in the cove," Slim told him. "You can't see her from here but we'll go down and look her over after a bit."

"How about the plane? Will we leave it here?" Gordon asked.

"What do you say, Jim?" Slim asked.

"I say let's take it with us, that is if we go. We may need it."

"Where do you get that if we go stuff?" Gordon snorted. "Of course we're going."

"But you forget that Slim's folks haven't given their consent yet."

"But I'm almost sure they will," Slim told them.

"Well, we'd better find out for sure and then get busy," Jim advised.

"You wait here and I'll go ask them right now," Slim said, getting up from where he was sitting. "I won't be but a minute because Father always means what he says the first time and if he says no that's all there is to it."

"Here's hoping," Gordon said as he disappeared around the corner of the building.

He was back in a few minutes and one glance at his face told them that he had been successful.

"It's all right," he told them. "Father says that if you two are along with me he'll feel easy. I told you I needed your support."

"I don't see that we supported you to any great extent," Jim laughed.

"Well, I got what I needed anyhow," Slim assured them. "And now come down to the boat house and I'll show you the diving suits. I've got them down there and they're all ready

to try out. The water's deep enough right out in front."

"How soon can we start?" Gordon asked as he followed him down a path.

"Couple of days, I reckon," Slim told him.

CHAPTER III

THE STORM

"Must have cost you something to get these suits made," Jim declared a few minutes later as they stood in the boat house examining the two diving suits.

"Not so much as you'd think," Slim told him. "Of course they did cost real money, but Father is very liberal with me when it comes to things like that. He believes in encouraging anything that is scientific."

"And he thinks that you are?" Gordon chuckled.

"I guess he does to some extent," Slim laughed. "Anyhow he doesn't very often turn me down on an experiment. Now I'm going to get into this suit of mine—you see, this one is a good deal bigger round than the other—and then we'll give it a try out. Everything is all ready, in fact, I had just finished working on them when you got here."

The suit looked much the same as the regulation diving suit so far as outward appearance

went except that it had no gloves. Slim explained that he wanted his hands free and that the wrist bands were supposed to fit close enough to keep out the water.

"I wanted it so that there would be no trouble in working the compressed air arrangement," he continued. "You see, each suit carries two of these little tubes and each tube works by means of a valve which has to be turned by hand. I did think of trying to make the one in the helmet, which supplies the air to breathe, work automatically but I didn't dare risk it. Now this one fits in right here at the side and all you have to do to inflate the suit when you want to come up is to give this valve a turn, like this."

"How long will one of those tubes in the helmet last?" Jim asked.

"About three hours I figure. And one of these other tubes will inflate the suit six or seven times. They don't cost much, the tubes, I mean."

Slim had been pulling on the suit while explaining the details and was now ready for the helmet to be screwed on.

"The water, at the end of the dock, is about thirty feet deep," he told them, "and I want you to tie this rope around my waist and let me

down, and then if it doesn't work all right you can pull me up. I think I'll have to give the valve in the helmet about a turn and a half to get the right amount of air but I'll have to try it before I get in the water to make sure. All right, screw it on."

They screwed on the heavy helmet and watched Slim's face through the glass window as he drew in a deep breath to test the air. A minute passed and he reached up his right arm and gave the valve a slight turn. Then he smiled as a signal that it was all right, and started toward the end of the dock.

They lifted him over the edge into the water and slowly lowered him until he was on the bottom. At once bubbles of air were to be seen, proving that he was breathing all right, and they played out the rope as the strain on it told that he was walking toward the open sea.

"My, but if that works it'll be a wonderful thing," Gordon declared just as a slackening of the rope told him that Slim had stopped. "Watch now," he cried, "I think he's coming up."

Almost holding their breaths they watched the spot about thirty feet out from the end of the pier where they could see bubbles coming to the surface.

"Seems to me it's—" Jim began but Gordon interrupted:

"There he comes," he cried as the top of the helmet appeared.

A moment later and the diver was floating with his head and shoulders out of water. They pulled him in with the rope, and as he climbed up the ladder, they could see through the window that he was highly elated.

"It worked, didn't it?" he said as Jim unscrewed the helmet.

"I'll say it did," Gordon replied. "How about letting me try the other one?"

"That's just what I want you to do."

Being under the water in a diving suit was a new experience for Gordon, but he thoroughly enjoyed it and everything worked all right. For a few minutes he walked about on the bottom and then, knowing that Jim was waiting to take his turn, he gave the valve on his side two turns, as Slim had directed. Quickly the suit began to swell as the confined air rushed out from the tube and in less than a minute he felt his feet leave the bottom. Then he shut the valve and just as he tightened it his head shot out of the water.

"Now do you think it's all right?" Slim asked after Jim had tried his hand at it.

"I don't see how it could be any better," Jim assured him as he stepped out of the suit. "Seems to me it works perfectly."

"Just so you don't get a puncture," Gordon laughed.

"But even that is provided for," Slim explained. "Suppose you should get a hole in the suit somewhere all you'd have to do would be to hold it shut with one hand and it would hold air all right."

"Yep, but suppose you got three punctures all in different places," Gordon grinned.

"I guess you'd be out of luck then," Slim laughed.

"Well, now that we've settled matters regarding the diving suits and all agree that they're all to the good we'd better turn our attention to the plane," Jim suggested.

"What about the plane?" Gordon asked, surprised.

"Use your head, son," Jim told him. "If we're to take the plane on the water we've got to fix it so that it'll float, haven't we?"

"Gee, but you do have a sensible idea at times," Gordon laughed. "Who'd a thunk it?"

"You mean we must rig it out with pontoons?" Slim asked.

"Sure. Think we can do it?" Jim asked.

"Well, I should smile, I think we could," Slim told him. "What we haven't here we can send for, but I believe we can find the material around the place. What will we need?"

"Thin galvanized iron would be best, I should say, but we might use light wood I suppose."

"Let me think a minute. Father used a lot of that kind of stuff in lining some tanks in his sugar mill a while ago and, if I'm not mistaken, there was a lot of it left. Come on, we'll go over to his office and ask him."

"Galvanized iron, let me see, I believe there's a lot of it out in the shed out back. Help yourself to what you can find," Mr. Togus told them when interviewed a little later.

"Think these will do?" Slim asked after they had located a dozen or more good sized sheets.

"Couldn't be better," Jim told him. "Now if you've got plenty of solder we can get to work.

It took them the best part of two days to make the pontoons and put them on in place of the wheels, but it was finally accomplished and when they tried the plane on the water it rode, as Gordon declared, like a duck.

"And the beauty of it is we can use it on the land just the same," Jim added.

"We'll be off in the morning if you fellows

don't object to working late to-night," Slim said as they moored the plane in front of the pier.

"To-morrow's Sunday," Jim reminded him.

"That's so. Well, we'll get all ready and get off to an early start Monday, eh?"

"You said it."

They had decided to all go in the boat and tow the plane although Gordon had declared that they could make better time by towing the boat by means of the plane. But Jim feared that the strain would be too much on the plane and Gordon had finally agreed that he was right. The boat was capable of making twenty-five miles an hour, Slim assured them, and they thought the weight of the plane would not slow them up more than five miles an hour at the most. So they figured that the trip would take them a little over two days as they planned to run all night.

They worked till late that night and shortly before midnight Slim announced that so far as he could see everything had been done and there was nothing to do but wait for Monday morning to come.

"And, believe me, it's going to be a long time coming," Gordon declared.

"But all things come to those who wait," Jim told him, and this was no exception.

"Good-bye and good luck," Mr. Togus shouted as the boat, the *Betty Ann,* drew away from the pier dragging the *Falcon* after her.

"You be careful now," Mrs. Togus shouted making a trumpet of her hands.

"We sure will," Slim shouted back, and the voyage had begun.

It was just six o'clock when they pulled out and at six o'clock that night Slim announced that they had made two hundred and sixty miles.

"Then we're ahead of our schedule," Gordon said.

"About twenty miles," Slim assured him.

It required two to run the boat so they took turns in catching naps without regard to the time of day. The night passed without event and at eight o'clock they sighted a large island which Slim informed them was Haiti.

"Then we're about half way there," Jim said.

"Rather more than half way," Slim declared. "I think that's Santa Barbara off there and that's pretty well over toward the eastern end of the island. Haiti is about three hundred miles long, you know."

"I didn't know it till now," Jim told him.

"Looks like a pretty good sized island," Gordon said as he started getting breakfast.

"Isn't Haiti the place where they pull all that voodoo stuff?"

"They used to do a lot of it and I guess they do some now back in the mountains," Slim told them.

Everything went well until late that afternoon. The engine was running perfectly and the plane seemed to be exerting hardly any pull on the boat and they were all in high spirits. But along toward five o'clock Jim pointed to a dark bank of clouds in the west and ventured an opinion that they were in for a storm. They were at the time about three miles off the eastern end of Porto Rico, and there was scarcely a ripple on the ocean. The heat had been very great all day and they had noticed that the barometer had been falling steadily since before noon.

"It may blow a little but I don't thing it'll amount to much," Slim told them.

"But wouldn't it be safer to put in for the night?" Jim suggested.

"Nonsense," Gordon snorted. "Who's afraid of a little blow?"

Slim backed him up and finally after some argument Jim reluctantly gave in. But he kept his weather eye on the clouds and several times, when the others were not looking, he shook his

head. But he was convinced that they were in for a blow and when, shortly before six o'clock, a deep mutter of thunder was heard, he wished that he had stuck to his point. Still the sea was glassy smooth and the *Betty Ann* cut through the water with unreduced speed.

"Gee, but it's hot," Gordon said as he came from the cabin where he had been taking a nap. "Better turn in for your turn, Jim."

"It's going to get cooler before long," Jim assured him. "I don't like the looks of the weather a little bit."

Even as he spoke a puff of wind was felt and a louder rumble of thunder increased his anxiety.

"We'd better get another line on the plane," he suggested, but before they could act the storm struck them with unexpected suddenness. One minute was almost a perfect calm and the next the wind was howling as though it would blow them out of the water.

"Head her into it or we'll go over," Jim shouted to Slim who was at the wheel.

It seemed as though the boat would never come around but after she had nearly rolled over half a dozen times he got her head into the wind and she rode a bit easier. But as the great waves rushed down upon them she buried her

nose in them and a flood of water swept the deck and poured into the cabin. It was almost as dark as night save when the vivid flashes of lightning lit up the sea. It did not seem possible that so tremendous a change could take place in so short a time and to Jim, at least, it did not seem possible that a boat the size of the *Betty Ann* could live long in that sea. But the staunch *Betty* plowed her way through wave after wave and the faithful engine never faltered.

"How long do these storms usually last down here?" Jim shouted to Slim.

"Never can tell," Slim shouted back.

Jim knew that they were heading away from the land and that there was no danger of running aground but he also realized that if it got much worse they would be in very grave danger. Indeed, it seemed to him even then, that they would founder when the next wave struck them. He was also very much worried regarding the plane and wished very much that they had not taken it along. But there was nothing that they could do about it now. Gordon had secured a bucket and was bailing the water from the cabin but was making but little headway against the floods which poured in every time the boat struck a wave. Jim was in the engine room

keeping a watchful eye on the engine. He knew that should it stop even for a minute it would be the end as no boat of that size could live in the trough of such a sea.

The lightning flashes were now coming closer together and the crackling of the thunder above the howling of the wind was incessant. All three boys had strapped on life preservers but their faces were pale and drawn. Then suddenly Jim heard a loud snap and knew that the rope, by which they were towing the plane, had snapped and his heart sank for he knew that there was little hope that they would ever see it again.

"What was that crack?" Gordon shouted sticking his head in the engine room.

"The tow rope broke," Jim told him.

"We must turn and get her back, then."

"Don't be foolish," Jim yelled at the top of his voice. "We'd swamp in a second if we tried to turn around."

"I suppose we would," Gordon agreed ruefully. "But I sure do hate to lose that old plane."

"I believe it's letting up a bit," Jim called a few minutes later.

The storm passed almost as suddenly as it had come up. The wind died in an incredibly

short time to a strong breeze although the sea still ran high. The heavy clouds which had shut out the sun began to part and the sun, now well down toward the western horizon, peeped through. The boat was still pitching wildly although shipping no more water and Gordon, coming from the cabin, announced that he had all the ocean poured back where it belonged.

"It's a wonder," he grinned, "that there was enough left outside to float the ship."

"There'd have been enough to drown us if she'd floundered," Jim told him.

"Think we can turn around now? We ought to be looking for the plane. There's a chance that it didn't smash."

"Go ask Slim what he thinks. It's still pretty rough."

He was back in a minute.

"Slim says sure Mike," he announced.

Jim thought sure that they were going over once as a big comber caught them broadside but the boat rolled back to an even keel after what seemed hours and the next moment was racing with the waves. Having had no experience with a hydroplane Jim had little idea as to how seaworthy the *Falcon* would prove to be. They had made the pontoons much smaller than the usual seaplane carried, but the plane was so

much lighter that he had noted that it drew not more than three or four inches of water. Whether this would be favorable or otherwise he was unable to say. He was sure the plane would not sink but if it turned over in the rough sea he believed that the force of the waves would soon smash it beyond hope of repair.

CHAPTER IV

NIGHT VISITORS

"If that wind got under the wings of the plane I reckon it would lift it clean over the island."

Gordon was standing in the bow of the boat scanning the sea through a pair of field glasses and Jim had left his engine for a moment to join him and learn if he had seen anything. The sea was still rough but nothing to what it had been and they had been on their way back for some twenty minutes running at about half speed. Porto Rico was in plain sight about five or six miles ahead and Gordon had said that he had seen nothing of the plane.

"I don't know but that you're right," Jim declared as he turned to go back to the engine.

He had been in the room but a few minutes when Slim rang for full speed ahead. He obeyed the signal and then again went forward. Gordon had the glass to his eyes but handed it to him as he joined him.

"Take a squint dead ahead," he told him.

"That's the plane all right and it seems to be right side up," Jim declared after a short glance.

"And it's up to us to get to it before it strikes on the rocks. It's probably going pretty fast even in this breeze and if it hits the rocks it'll more than likely smash up. You got on all the juice?"

"All she's got."

"Well, it's going to be nip and tuck. That plane doesn't look to be more than a quarter of a mile from the land."

"We'll catch her," Slim promised from the wheel house. "We must be going ten feet to her one."

Jim turned back to the engine to see if he could coax a bit more speed from it, but the power was on full and all he could do was to watch it and see that it was kept well oiled. Gordon could now see the plane plainly without the aid of the glass and was rejoiced to note that it was riding the waves in a way that indicated that it had not been damaged. And they were gaining rapidly. But, on the other hand, he could now see that but a short stretch of water separated the plane from an almost perpendicular cliff of rocks against which the waves were dashing with great force. Unless

they caught it before it struck those rocks, he knew well that the plane would be shattered beyond repair in a very few minutes.

"We're going to be too late," he said to Slim and there was more than a note of sadness in his voice.

"Don't you believe it," Slim encouraged him. "We've only about half a mile to go and she won't hit for another five minutes. We've lots of time."

One minute passed and another and they were almost up to the plane. Gordon had laid his plans as to the best way to handle the situation and had explained to Slim just what he was to do. He stood in the bow with a coil of rope in his hand as the *Betty Ann* swept down on the plane, now only a few yards from the rocks. The plane was tail toward them and headed straight for the cliff, and when the boat was almost on it Slim gave the wheel a turn and the boat swept past and turned in between the plane and the cliff with barely room enough to get through.

Gordon realized that now everything depended on him and a prayer was on his lips as he threw the rope. He had practiced much at throwing the lasso but the pitching boat gave him much worry and as the rope left his hand

he was sure he had missed. But no, the loop settled over one of the blades of the propeller and he hurriedly pulled in the slack and tightened the noose before it slipped off. Then came the jerk as the rope tightened and he was all but pulled overboard. But he managed to hold on and a moment later had sped to the rear of the boat and had the line securely fastened. It was a very neat piece of work and he noted that the tail of the plane missed the rock by barely a dozen feet.

"That was mighty well done," Jim, who emerged from the engine room in time to see it, shouted.

"But it was very close, very very close," Gordon sighed, as he sat down on the deck. "If we'd been even a small fraction of a second later—well, we wouldn't have done it, that's all."

"I'll tell the world it was close," Jim agreed patting him on the shoulder. "There's no wild west cow-boy could have done it better. It's a lucky thing for us that you know how to throw a rope."

A few minutes later they were comparing notes with Slim who declared it to be the neatest piece of work he had ever seen.

"There's not another man in the world could have done it," he asserted.

"Nonsense," Gordon told him.

"No nonsense about it," Slim insisted. "If I could throw a rope like that I'd go on the stage and make a fortune."

"It was more luck than anything else I reckon," Gordon said modestly.

"Luck, me eye," Slim asserted. "Do you suppose you'd have taken a chance like that unless you had mighty good reason for believing that you could do it? You were as cool as a cucumber. Oh, I was looking at yees, be jabbers, an' yer can't fool me."

When Fred started out to ape an Irishman he was very funny and his imitation was perfect and he soon had both boys laughing. But in a moment he was serious again.

"Unless I'm mistaken there's a good harbor back there a bit to our right and it seems to me I can see something that looks like a town. Now I suggest that we put in there for the night. I don't just like the looks of the weather, and then again, we ought to fill up with gas while we have the chance. I expect we used a lot while we were bucking that gale."

"Good idea," Jim agreed. "And it wouldn't be a bad plan to look over the engine while

we're about it, and I'd like also to see if the plane's all right. It hardly seems possible that it could have come through a storm like that without some damage being done."

Slim had already turned the boat and they were now heading for a little inlet just beyond which a cluster of buildings could be seen. It proved to be a good harbor and just before dark they dropped anchor a few yards from the dock, and lowered the little tender.

"Think it'll be all right to leave her alone?" Jim asked.

"I guess perhaps it would be safer for one of us to stay and see that no one comes aboard. There's one bad thing about the natives on these islands and that is you can't trust them."

"I'll stay," Gordon volunteered. "How long you going to be gone?"

"We ought to be back in an hour," Slim told him. "We may have a little trouble in finding gas but I guess there'll be some in the town somewhere."

"Then I'll have supper ready in an hour and you two want to see to it that you don't keep it waiting. Get me?" Gordon said as they climbed over the side of the boat.

"Far be it from me to keep a meal waiting," Slim laughed.

They found that the town consisted of about a dozen houses and a single store. But, fortunately, the store-keeper, who was a white man, had a supply of gas on hand and readily agreed to deliver fifty gallons to the boat early in the morning.

"I guess we might as well get right back," Slim suggested, as they came out from the store. "It'll be pretty near an hour at that," he added glancing at his watch.

It lacked but ten minutes of the stipulated time when they climbed over the rail and Gordon had supper all ready and, as Slim told him, it was a mighty good one.

"We'll get to bed early," Jim suggested, as they sat down to the meal, "and get up early. Then we'll have a chance to give the plane and the engine the once over before he gets here with the gas."

"I guess that man at the store is a kind of king here," Slim told them as they started eating. "He's the only white man I saw in the village."

"Well, I wouldn't call it much of a kingdom at that," Jim laughed. "I didn't see over a dozen natives while we were ashore, but they sure did look as though they needed a king."

It was nine o'clock by the time they had the

dishes washed and put away, and fifteen minutes later they were all asleep.

It was sometime in the night that Jim felt a nudge in his side and woke up to find Gordon bending over his bunk.

"What's up?" he whispered.

"There's someone on the boat outside," Gordon told him.

Jim had swung his feet to the floor and began pulling his clothes on over his pajamas. "Is Slim awake?" he asked.

"Don't you hear him snoring?" Gordon whispered. "No use in waking him till it's necessary. Got your flash and gun?"

"Right with you."

Gordon was already partly dressed, and softly they stole from the cabin going out the forward door. The night was very dark and a light drizzle had set in and it was impossible to see a foot in front of them. Just outside the doorway they stood and listened. The sound of low voices at once reached them coming, it seemed, from the rear of the boat. They could not understand anything that was being said, but it was evident that at least two men were aboard the boat.

"I don't think there's more than two," Jim whispered.

"I think you're right. Probably a couple of darkies come aboard to see what they can steal. Let's get around there and take them by surprise. They probably haven't got any guns."

They started aft, their bare feet making no sound, with Jim leading the way. The voices became more plainly audible and they could tell that they were speaking native dialect and, of course, the boys could not understand a word of it. From the sound they judged that the men were in the stern and it seemed as though they were disputing over something as now and then their voices were raised above the general tone.

Suddenly Jim stopped and Gordon bumped into him but without making any noise. The voices had stopped and they could tell that the men were coming toward them. Jim waited until he judged that the man in front was only a few feet away and then he suddenly flashed his light, revealing a large negro naked save for a dirty loin cloth. Close behind him was a second man not quite so large but similarly dressed.

A loud grunt of surprise followed the flashing on of the light and before Jim had time to speak the larger of the negroes had leaped over the side and a loud splash sounded as his body struck the water. The other man seemed too

scared to move and stood blinking at the bright light.

"What are you doing on this boat?" Jim demanded.

Instantly the man started jabbering, holding out his hands as though to indicate that he meant no harm, but Jim interrupted with a curt order for him to follow the other over the side. The man probably could not understand a word of what he said but there was no doubting the gesture and he moved toward the rail as though about to obey. Thinking that he was about to jump Jim lowered his automatic which he held in his right hand, and before he knew what had happened the negro had leaped on him and bore him to the deck. At the same instant Gordon felt pair of powerful arms around his neck and he, too, was pulled over backward.

Under the violence of the onslaught both the flashlight and the automatic flew from Jim's hands and they were in pitch darkness. The negro who had attacked Jim was a powerful man but, as Jim surmised, knew nothing of scientific wrestling. Nevertheless for a moment Jim had all he could do to keep his hands from getting a grip on his throat. Those hands were strong and he knew that once they fastened on his neck his breath would be shut off and it

would probably be the end. But he had no intention of permitting it to happen and squirmed about so rapidly that the man was unable to secure a firm hold. Once he got to his feet but the powerful arms wrapped about his knees and brought him down again. But he fell on the negro and succeeded in planting his fist in his face, a blow which seemed to take much of the fight out of him.

But he was not done and for fully another minute they tumbled about on the floor, now Jim on top and then the negro. Finally Jim again got to his feet and as the man rushed for him in the darkness he succeeded in getting the hold he had been trying for and the next instant the negro was catapulted over his back and, as he was close to the rail, he cleared that and struck the water with a loud splash.

And now, for the first time, Jim was conscious that another fight was being waged only a few feet away. Smack! That sounded like a fist hitting more or less solid flesh. Wham! That was someone's head hitting the floor.

"Gordon," Jim shouted.

"Got him," Gordon called back.

Then another loud splash told that the battle was over and won.

"He was a tough baby all right," Gordon de-

clared after he was certain that Jim was all right, "but he's too slow. He almost had me once, though. I'll bet he could break a cocoanut with those hands of his."

"What's the matter out there?"

It was Slim's voice calling from the cabin and Jim, who had recovered his flashlight and automatic, led the way inside.

"We've been taking our daily dozen," he laughed, as Slim snapped on the light.

"You look it," he told them.

"Well, we had visitors," Jim explained, "and Gordon and I sort of acted as a reception committee."

"And they didn't like us," Gordon added.

"By the way, Gordon, there must have been three of them," Jim said. "I thought there were only two."

"That's all there were," Gordon told him. "That guy that jumped over first must have climbed back."

"What makes you think so?" Jim asked.

"Because that fellow's hair was wet, the one I was entertaining I mean."

"Then they may climb back again," Jim suggested. "I reckon we'd better get outside and take a look around. Turn on all the lights, will you?" he added, turning to Slim.

Instantly the deck of the boat was brightly illuminated and they all went out. But there was no sign of anyone and, after a careful search, they concluded that the two negroes must have had enough and had swam to the shore.

"I guess they thought the reception committee was a bit too receptive," Slim laughed.

"Well, it tried to make things interesting for them," Gordon told him.

A glance at the clock told them that it was almost time for the dawn to break and they decided that they would not go back to bed, but would get breakfast and then get to work seeing that everything was all right with the engine and the plane.

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST TIME DOWN

Two negroes brought the gasoline out in ten five-gallon cans in a small canoe soon after they had finished looking over the engine and the plane. One of them looked to Jim very much like the man he had tossed overboard only a few hours before. But as they all looked very much alike he could not be sure of it and said nothing about it to the others. One of the men had a bill which he handed to Jim before they started to transfer the liquid.

"Safety first with that guy," Slim laughed as he took the bill from Jim's hand.

He paid the man and soon the gas was in the tanks and they were ready to start off again.

"We've got just about three hundred miles to go," Slim told them as they passed out of the harbor.

"It's a good thing you've studied navigation," Gordon said as he watched Slim bend over the compass and then glance at his chart.

"We should be there in about twelve hours, eh?"

"If we have good luck," Slim told him.

"And not too many thrills," Jim added.

It was a beautiful morning, warm but not hot as yet, although they knew it would be later in the day. There was not a cloud to be seen and the sky was a beautiful blue which Jim laughingly declared matched Gordon's eyes.

As the sun rose higher in the sky the heat increased until the thermometer in the cabin registered a hundred degrees. There was little or no wind and the sea was as smooth as a mill pond. Slim told them that they had covered a hundred and fifty miles when Gordon called him to dinner shortly before noon, and declared that they ought to reach their destination by six o'clock.

All throughout the long lazy afternoon the boat cut through the water drawing the plane after her and shortly before six o'clock they sighted an island which Slim told them should be Basse Terre.

"If I'm right and this chart doesn't lie that's the place," he declared.

"And not a single thrill all day," Gordon sighed.

"For which I'm duly thankful," Jim added.

An hour later they dropped anchor in a little bay sheltered by frowning cliffs and a long curved arm which more than half inclosed it.

"Well, here we are," Slim asserted as the anchor touched bottom.

"You bet," Gordon told him. "And it's me for a swim right now."

"Not so you'd notice it," Slim told him.

"Why not?" Gordon asked very much surprised.

"Look out there and you'll see the answer," Slim told him, pointing off to the right of the boat.

Gordon's eyes followed his finger and saw a triangular fin cutting through the water about a hundred feet from the boat.

"Answer's conclusive and correct," he grinned. "But I've read that sharks will not attack a man," he added.

"So have I," Slim smiled, "but the trouble with these fellows down here in these waters is that they don't know the rules."

"Reminds me of old Sim Perkins up in Maine," Jim grinned.

"What about Sim?" Slim asked.

"Sim lives in North New Portland and there are quite a lot of bears up there. Well, one day Sim was out picking raspberries and he heard

a noise on the other side of a clump of bushes and went around to see what was up, and there was a big bear, about as big as a house, as he put it. Sim had seen bears before and knew that they usually would run away from a man, but this fellow ran the other way and there was nothing for Sim to do but run too. Fortunately he beat the bear to a small tree and had time to get up in the branches where he had to stay several hours before the bear gave it up and went away.

"Sim was telling about it the next day in the general store and there happened to be a salesman there. This man laughed when Sim had finished and declared that a bear would never run after a man. 'I know that's the rules,' Sim told him, 'but I reckon as how this one was expelled from school before they got to that lesson'."

"And the sharks aren't the worst things in these waters," Slim told them after they had laughed at Jim's story. "There are big barracuda which are much more ferocious than any shark ever dared be. One of those birds will take a hunk out of a fellow's leg like you'd take a bite of an apple. Believe me, they're bad acting babies. No, you're not going in swimming."

"Don't I know it?" Gordon grinned.

"But how about them attacking us when we go down with the suit on?" Jim asked.

"There's a chance of course," Slim told him. "But a man in a diving suit is a pretty fierce looking animal himself and that sort of protects him. And, of course, we'll carry a big knife always when we go down and a good prick will sort of discourage them, I guess. But that's a danger we've always got to guard against."

"How about devil fish?" Gordon asked.

"They're not so plentiful," Slim told him. "Of course they're not very pleasant customers, but they're slow and if we keep on the watch all the time I don't think there's much of any danger on that score. Take it all around it's the barracuda that's the worst. They're swift as a streak of lightning and they've got teeth like needles. But I really doubt if they'd touch a man in a diving suit."

"Well, I don't intend that one of 'em will touch me, not if I see him first," Gorden declared. "I'm a peaceful sort but I can get riled on occasion."

"And it'll be an occasion if a good sized barracuda gets after you," Slim laughed.

"For me or the fish?"

"Maybe for both."

There was still a couple of hours of daylight

and Jim suggested that they get a bite to eat and then take a flight in the plane.

"We can see what the country around here looks like," he told them, "and get back before dark."

From where they were anchored they could see practically nothing of the island and there was no sign of any houses, although Slim told them that he understood a few natives lived there. The *Betty Ann* lay about three hundred yards from the land and they thought it would be safe to leave her without a guard.

"We'll not be gone more than a half hour and I don't believe anyone could get here in that time anyhow," Gordon asserted.

Supper was hurried through and by half past six they were seated in the plane ready to start.

"You really mean that she'll go straight up?" Slim asked, leaning over Jim's shoulder from the back seat.

"You'll see in about a minute," Jim told him as he turned on the power.

The elevator propellor began to turn and whirled faster and faster until, with a slight lurch the pontoons left the water. As soon as they were clear of the water Jim turned on the other motor and the plane began to glide upward at an oblique angle.

"I'll say she'll go up," Slim cried. "But it does seem funny not to hear any noise. I've been up a number of times but it never seemed like this."

Jim cleared the cliffs by a hundred feet and they got their first good view of the island. They saw that it was nearly round and about fifteen miles in diameter. For the most part it was heavily wooded but here and there were open spaces, and soon they spied little clusters of huts which showed that the island was inhabited.

"Doesn't look very prosperous," Gordon ventured.

"I don't think there are many white men who live on the island, and as a matter of fact, I guess there aren't a whole lot of any color," Slim told him. "Of course," he explained, "I never was here but I've been reading up on it lately and according to the best information I could find, there aren't more than a hundred inhabitants all told."

"But what do they live on?" Jim asked.

"They don't, they only exist if you ask me," Slim said.

"There's lots of people in other places besides this who do that," Jim told them.

The general character of the island was

about the same over its entire surface. There were, perhaps, a half dozen of the little villages each consisting of a few poorly built huts but they saw not more than a dozen of the inhabitants. They flew at an altitude of about three thousand feet and the men they did see looked like ants and it is doubtful if they were seen at all. Jim had advised that they keep up fairly high, declaring that it would be foolish to advertise their presence.

They returned to the boat before dark and found everything as they had left it. There was still nothing in the way of a boat in sight and no evidence that anyone had been there.

"I don't suppose a boat comes within a mile of here once a year," Slim told them.

"Then the fishing ought to be pretty good," Gordon suggested.

"There's plenty of tackle in that box under the front window in the cabin," Slim told him.

"Then we'll have fresh fish for dinner tomorrow," Gordon promised them.

After dinner everything was made shipshape for the night, they gathered around the table in the cabin and Slim got out the old map showing the supposed location of the wreck.

"Now this long arm that reaches out here must be that one over there back of us," he said.

"And this sharp point here must be that promontory we saw about ten miles straight across the cove. You can just see it now out of the window," he added pointing out the porthole.

"Seems reasonable," Jim told him.

"Now the cross here, that marks the position of the wreck, is just about half-way between the two points and right in a line, so it seems to me it ought not to be very hard to locate it."

"Just a minute," Jim broke in. "I don't want to be a crepe hanger or throw cold water on anything, but we've got to remember that that map probably isn't very accurate. The man who made it was, of course, very much excited at the time the ship went down and he wouldn't be expected to be able to put the mark in exactly the right place. No, I'm not saying we can't find it," he declared as Gordon was about to interrupt, "I only want you to understand that the chances are that we'll have to hunt over an area of several square miles to say the least before we locate it. Of course we may be lucky, but we don't want to count on it too much and be disappointed."

"Quite a speech," Gordon chuckled.

"Well, you know how optomistic you are," Jim reminded him.

"Who is?"

"You are, and you know it."

"Well, maybe so," Gordon chuckled, "but I'd rather be that than a pessimist."

"Meaning that I'm one?" Jim asked.

"You know better than that," Gordon assured him.

"All right, then," Slim broke in, "now that the family squabble is settled to everyone's satisfaction suppose we once more turn our attention to the matter in hand. How had we better tackle it?"

"There's only one way that I can see," Jim told him. "We'll get as near as we can to where that mark seems to be and then work out from there."

"That's my idea," Slim agreed. "If the suits work as well as I hope they will we can cover quite a lot of ground."

The night passed without event and when Jim and Slim got out of their berths they found that Gordon had been up long enough to catch a couple of good sized fish and had them nearly cooked.

"My goodness, but some folks are ambitious," Slim declared as he smelled the frying fish and entered the galley.

"I was brought up to understand that you'd never get anywhere by lying in bed all day,"

Gordon grinned. "And besides, I like to fish," he added.

"Especially the latter," Jim laughed as he came in buttoning up his shirt.

As soon as breakfast was over and the dishes washed and put away, they weighed anchor and started the engine. The point of the long arm and the promontory were plainly to be seen and in half an hour they had reached a position which they judged to be half-way between them.

"I guess this is as near as we can come to it," Slim declared as he signaled to stop.

"I'd say so," Gordon agreed.

They found the water to be about seventy feet deep when they let down the anchor which depth agreed pretty well with the map, and Jim suggested that it was a good sign. Then came the work of getting the suits on and making sure that everything was all in good working order.

"I'm going to make the first trip down," Slim announced when everything was in readiness.

"Suppose we draw lots for the first trip," Jim suggested.

"No, I think it's up to me seeing that I started it," Slim insisted.

"All right if you feel that way about it," Jim gave in.

Slim was already pulling on the suit and soon was ready for Jim to screw on the helmet. They had already decided that a rope was to be used at first as it would be an added factor of safety.

"Now remember," Slim said just before Jim screwed on the helmet, "one tug means that I'm in trouble and want to be pulled up. I'm only going to stay down a few minutes this first time anyhow."

A moment later he stepped over the side of the boat and started down the ladder which had been put over for the purpose. As soon as his head was under water bubbles showed that everything so far as the air was concerned was all right. Jim let out the line hand over hand until the strain on it ceased and he knew that Slim was on the bottom.

"Be a joke if he should land right on the wreck, wouldn't it," Gordon said as he watched the bubbles come to the surface.

"It would indeed," Jim told him, "but that's too much to even hope for. I tell you, old man, it'll be a wonder if we find it at all. I haven't said much about it but between you and me and the fence post it's a pretty long shot. I'm more than half inclined to believe that it's just a fairy tale, and even if it isn't it happened a good many years ago."

"To tell the truth about it," Gordon told him, "I feel the same way about it. But we'll probably have some fun out of it anyhow."

"We usually do," Jim assured him.

Just then they saw a slight movement in the water a few yards from the boat and an instant later the helmet shot out of the water and Slim waved his hand to them. Jim quickly pulled him in and as soon as he was on board he unscrewed the helmet.

"Did you find it?" Gordon asked with a smile.

"No, but it was wonderful," Slim told them. "I didn't have a bit of trouble."

"That's fine," Jim said. "Now it's my turn to take a stab at it."

"How about me?" Gordon demanded.

"All right you can go next," Jim told him.

"Not so you'd notice it," Gordon grinned. "No, you're going to have the next turn and that's all there is about it."

When Gordon spoke in that way Jim knew that it was no use to argue, so he said nothing more but started pulling on the other suit. He had never been beneath the surface of the water in a diving suit and it was indeed a wonderful experience as he slid down through the green water. It seemed to him a long time before his feet struck the bottom but when they did he

was surprised at the ease with which he could move about. The air in his helmet was perfectly adjusted and he could breathe as easily as when in the open air. He stood still for a minute and looked about him.

Small fish of strange appearance and bright coloring swam about him seemingly unafraid. The floor of the sea was of hard sand for the most part but a short distance from him was a clump of what looked like long waving ferns. He was about to walk toward it when a large fish swam slowly from behind it toward him. He thought it must be a shark and drew the knife from his belt. But with the movement of his hand the fish darted back and disappeared.

For some five minutes Jim walked about on the floor of the sea, then knowing that Gordon was waiting anxiously for his turn, he pressed the valve which opened the tube of compressed air and at once felt the suit bulging out. It was a peculiar sensation and he waited wondering how long it would take before he started to go up.

It was only a minute before he felt his feet leave the sand and he closed the tube. Up he went slowly and evenly and soon his head popped out of the water and he was drawn aboard, and it was Gordon's turn to go down.

"I'll bet I bring the old wreck up with me," he joked as Slim picked up the helmet.

"If you do you can have all the treasure," Slim promised him.

"If you see a shark down there just wave your hand at him and he'll run," Jim told him.

"Did you see one?"

"I saw a pretty good sized fish but he skipped when I reached for my knife. I guess it was a shark or something."

"I guess it must have been," Slim laughed.

CHAPTER VI

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

Gordon had his turn and then they set about the serious business of searching for the wreck. After talking it over they decided that they would go down two at a time and without a line being attached to them. They all recognized that the line was an added factor of safety but, at the same time, it greatly curtailed the limits of their distance as they could go but a few yards in any direction. Two going down together and staying together would, they considered, be as safe as could be expected.

"I could see for quite a distance when I was down, and there was nothing that looked like a wreck," Gordon told them, "so I'd suggest that we move a bit before going down again."

"Which way?" Slim asked.

"I reckon it's a toss-up," Jim said. "Let's go toward the point. I believe we're a little more

than half way across and that'll bring us nearer the middle."

A few minutes later they again let down the anchor in water about ten feet deeper than where they had been, and Slim and Jim donned the suits.

"Now don't stay down too long," Gordon warned them, "because I'll be worried and come down after you without any suit."

"You stay put here on the boat," Jim ordered him.

As Jim let go the ladder he was conscious of an all-gone feeling in the pit of his stomach which increased as he dropped down through the green water. It seemed to him that he was sinking too rapidly and he began to beat the water with his hands in an effort to diminish his speed. Whether he was accomplishing anything was more than he could tell, but soon his feet struck the bottom with hardly a jar and he knew that he had not come down nearly as fast as he had thought. Before he had time to look about him Slim landed about six feet away, and his face, seen through the glass, was all smiles.

Slim pointed in the direction of the point and Jim nodded his head in agreement and they

started off. The floor of the sea was very smooth and, as far as they could see, clear of any kind of growth. Of course their progress was slow but the water offered less resistance to their bodies than Jim had expected from what he had read about diving. He was conscious of a slight pressure on his body but not enough to be disagreeable.

The air was being supplied in just the right amount to make breathing natural and soon the uneasiness, which he had felt, wore off and he began to enjoy the adventure. The water was very clear and he could see for perhaps fifty or sixty feet with sufficient clearness to locate any large object. Thus he figured that they were covering a path of nearly a hundred feet in width.

Fish there was in quantities but they were all small and swam about them seemingly unafraid. He nearly caught one bright colored specimen, about a foot long, in his hand, but the fish, with a sudden flip of its tail, eluded him.

For about fifteen minutes they trudged along, Jim leading the way and Slim following close at his heels. The character of the floor did not change in the least and they saw no growth of

any kind. He figured that they had covered approximately a quarter of a mile and judged that it was time they turned back. So he motioned to that effect and Slim nodded his head. They had agreed that they would return in a parallel line about a hundred feet to their right, so Jim led the way in that direction, taking fifty steps before again turning. Both boys had water-proof watches strapped on their wrists and when they had spent the same time returning Jim turned at right angles and began to watch out for the anchor rope.

It may well be supposed that, having nothing which they could use as a guide, it would be very difficult for them to keep a straight line. But Jim possessed a very highly developed sense of direction and that was why he had taken the lead. He knew that, unless he had miscalculated, he should be able to see the anchor rope, soon after making the turn, and he was not disappointed, for he spied it before he had taken more than forty or fifty steps.

"There's no use in wasting air when there's a rope as handy as this," he said to himself as he grasped hold of it and began to pull himself up hand over hand.

He was about half way up when Slim shot past him going at what seemed to him a pretty fast clip.

"He must have blown himself up to the limit," he chuckled, as Slim's feet just missed his head.

"Well, I suppose you found it," Gordon laughed as he unscrewed Jim's helmet.

"Not so you'd notice it," Jim grinned.

"What's the idea of using the elevator?" asked Slim, who had already removed his helmet.

"I was afraid the traffic would be too heavy if I came up the way you did," Jim told him.

"Well, you must want exercise," Slim laughed. "I never could see the sense in working when you don't have to. Me for the air route every time."

"I'll bet," Gordon chuckled.

"I'm not lazy but if you were as fat as I am I'll bet you would do the same as I do."

"No doubt," Jim assured him. "How about dinner?" he added, turning to Gordon.

"Be ready in ten minutes, and then I'll go down and find the wreck for you," Gordon told him.

"Perhaps," Jim added.

As soon as the meal was over they moved the boat about a quarter of a mile toward the point and it was decided that Gordon and Jim would be the ones to go down. Slim objected at first on the ground that his suit would never do for either of them as it was made especially for him, but on trying it on they found that, although it was rather baggy, it was fully as comfortable as the other. Jim was the one to try it on and he insisted that it fitted him all right.

"Only you want to be careful when you blow it up and not put in too much air or you'll shoot clear out of the water when you reach the surface," Slim cautioned him.

"I'll be around to grab hold of his heels," Gordon promised.

"I reckon I can come up the same way I did this forenoon," Jim told them.

Although they had estimated that their new position was but a short distance from where they had been on their previous descent they found that the floor of the sea was more or less covered with dense bunches of submarine growth which made it impossible for them to see but a short distance in any direction. They hit bottom within a few feet of each other and

Jim signalled Gordon to keep close beside him. There was, of course, no danger of getting lost, as they could rise to the surface at any time, but he knew that the waters were infested with barracuda and other dangerous denizens of the deep. He had read how barracuda would dart out from their hiding places in the tangles of growth and attack a man, inflicting severe wounds.

Again man eating sharks were native to the waters and there was no knowing when one of the fierce fish would meet them. So they started off in the direction of the point side by side skirting the clumps of growth and keeping as far from them as possible without deviating too far from their course.

They had covered about a hundred yards and were rounding a particularly large growth when there came a sudden swirl in the water and Jim, who was leading at the moment, jerked his hand aside as a fish, about three feet long, flashed by. He did not doubt but that it was a barracuda and, with his other hand, he drew his knife from his belt ready for a defense in case the fish returned to the attack.

But they saw nothing more of it and after a

short wait they pressed on. Jim, from now on, was even more cautious than he had been before for he knew that a snap of the needle-like teeth in the powerful jaws of one of those fish could sever a man's hand and, as he afterward confided to Gordon, he had no more than he wanted. But they saw no more of them and finally returned to where the anchor rope told them they had started, with no success. But they were in no measure discouraged as they had no real expectation of finding the wreck for many days if at all.

Jim started up the rope and Gordon followed. As Jim reached the surface he expected to see Slim leaning over the bow with the ladder ready for him. But in this he was disappointed and after jerking in vain on the rope to attract his attention he was obliged to inflate his suit so that he would float and could paddle around to where the ladder was hanging over the side. Gordon had beaten him to it and was already on deck when he reached it.

"Guess Slim's taking a nap," Gordon said as soon as they had removed each other's helmets.

"Naturally," Jim replied.

"And the trouble is you could explode a

charge of dynamite under him and never get a rise once he gets to snoring."

"Well, I'll get him up," Jim declared as he pulled his legs from the suit.

He went into the little cabin and made his way forward where the bunks were situated and reached his hand into Slim's with the intention of dragging him out onto the floor. But to his great surprise the bunk was empty. He quickly examined the other bunks with a like result, and then hurried into the galley. But this also was empty. There was no other place on the boat which could conceal him and he rushed to the deck a look of alarm on his face.

"Did you get him up?" Gordon asked without turning his head.

"He's not there," Jim told him.

"Aw, quit your kidding."

"But I tell you he's not on the boat."

"Nonsense."

"Maybe, but it's true just the same. I've looked everywhere."

"But he must be."

"Granted, but he isn't."

"But he couldn't get off anywhere, the tender's here and the plane too."

"Granted again, but the fact remains that Slim's not here."

"Then where is he?"

"Now you're asking me something I can't answer. There's no indication anywhere that there's been a fight of any kind and yet he surely wouldn't go off of his own accord," Jim explained.

"You think he's been taken off?" Gordon asked.

"What else is there to think? He was here when we left and he's not here now."

"He must be. I'll find him. He's probably hiding somewhere to give us a scare."

"Go ahead and I sure hope you succeed."

But after fifteen minutes Gordon was obliged to acknowledge that Slim was not on board. He had searched every possible place where he might be concealed without success and the two boys looked at each other in perplexity.

"Suppose it's possible that he's hiding in the plane?" Gordon finally asked.

"Look for yourself," Jim told him. "You can see from here that he isn't. He couldn't begin to get into the cubby hole and that's the only place of any size that isn't open."

"You're right of course. Now let's look at it in a sensible way. Either he left of his own accord, in which case he must have swam away, or someone came aboard and kidnapped him. Which is the more likely?"

"The latter of course."

"Right. Now, whoever took him must have gotten to him when he was asleep, otherwise there'd be some evidence of a scrap. Slim wouldn't let anyone pick him up and carry him off without a fight. You know that as well as I do."

"Granted."

"But why?"

"Exactly."

"Well, we'd better get busy and not waste time speculating about whys. They can't have been gone very long and we ought to be able to find them in the plane.

"With the plane, you mean."

"This is no time to be funny," Gordon reminded him.

"Certainly not. Come on," Jim told him.

It was but the work of a minute to clamber into the plane and soon they were rising from the water determined to find their lost chum

before they returned. How they would proceed to get him away from whoever had captured him they had not had time to consider. The first thing was to find him. Ways and means could be reckoned with later.

"Keep your eyes peeled," Jim ordered as he started the forward propeller and headed toward the island.

"You bet," Gordon promised. "Don't go up too high."

"They must have come out in a boat and we ought to get sight of it almost at once, but it'll probably be along the shore and may be hidden, so look sharp."

"I'll see it if it exists," Gordon told him. "Get over to the right a bit more, there's a little cove there and it might be hidden in it."

But there was no boat in the cove and no sign of any living creature. For fully an hour they flew over the little island, Jim at the wheel and Gordon watching through the glass. As they passed over the collections of huts on the different parts of the island the few natives appeared to be tending to their usual tasks and there was nothing to indicate that anything unusual had taken place.

"We don't seem to be getting anywhere," Gordon confessed at the end of the hour.

"And yet he must be somewhere on the island," Jim insisted.

"I suppose so, but where? That's the question and there doesn't seem to be any answer."

"We'll find one unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Well, I don't want to be pessimistic, but hasn't it occurred to you that he might have fallen overboard?" Jim asked slowly as he turned the wheel and headed out toward the boat.

"But he could swim," Gordon objected.

"I know, but a shark might have attacked him and—"

"Nonsense," Gordon interrupted. "A shark wouldn't come as near the boat as that."

"I'm not so sure of that," Jim went on. "I saw a big fellow this morning not twenty feet from the side of the boat. Now, mind, I don't think that's what has happened, but it's possible, you'll have to acknowledge that."

"Yes, I suppose you're right, but I'm not going to believe it till I have to," Gordon declared.

"Of course not. But what shall we do now?

It's pretty plain that if someone has kidnapped him they've got him hid away somewhere where we can't find him from the plane."

"How about trying it on foot?"

"No. In the first place we wouldn't stand the ghost of a show, and in the second, we wouldn't last long enough to even make a fair stab at it."

"You mean—"

"That if our suspicions are right we'd be captured before we'd been on the land ten minutes."

"But we've got our guns."

"And they've got the advantage of knowing the lay of the land and in a case like this that's worth all the guns in the world. Of course we'll take a chance at it if it seems best later on, but if we should get caught by the same fellows we wouldn't be in any position to do anything for Slim."

"Well, it's our move and we've got to do something," Gordon insisted as the plane hovered over the boat and slowly settled down by its side.

"I'm going to make a more careful search of the boat the first thing. No, I don't expect to

find him here, but we may find something that we overlooked that'll give us a clue," Jim said as he made the plane fast to the stern of the boat.

They spent an hour going over the *Betty Ann* inch by inch but when the search was over they had found absolutely nothing. Everything was in perfect order and there was no clue to the missing boy.

CHAPTER VII

THE RESCUE

"While we're thinking what to do we might as well get something to eat," Gordon declared after Jim had acknowledged that it was no use looking further on the boat. "Not that I'm hungry," he hastened to explain, "but we're going to need all our strength, I reckon."

"I suppose the right thing to do is to start in the plane for Slim's home and report to his father," Jim declared as he moved toward the galley. "But I sure do hate to give up so soon."

"It's going to be pretty dark to-night," Gordon suggested.

"Good night for hunting, eh?"

"You said it. Are you game?"

"You know it."

"Good. Then just as soon as it gets dark we'll take the plane and land near that cove and if we can't keep out of the way of a lot of darkies we'll deserve to be caught. Right?"

"On the head," Jim smiled. "But we've got to be careful. "If they catch us it'll be all up, not only with us but with Slim as well."

"We're not going to be caught. You know, I've got a hunch that we're going to find him and that everything's going to come out all right."

"Here's hoping that your hunch is a good one," Jim smiled.

"That's the way to look at it," Gordon told him.

They said but little while they were eating their supper but each knew that the other was busy with his thoughts. They recognized that the proposed expedition was a dangerous one but they knew that their friend, if alive, was in danger and that was enough to urge them to any limit which promised a chance of success. If the search yielded nothing there would be the necessity of leaving in the morning and reporting to his parents and this was a course they both dreaded. They were determined to find him if it was a possibility.

It would be at least two hours before it would be dark enough to start and they lingered as long as possible over the meal dreading the

long wait. But all things, as Gordon declared, come to those who wait and finally Jim announced that it was dark enough.

"Sure you got your gun?" he asked as he climbed into the cockpit of the plane.

"Ask me if I've got my head," Gordon snorted, as he followed him over the side.

"Good thing this motor doesn't make any noise," Jim said as he started the elevator.

"If it did we'd be out of luck," Gordon told him. "It's been a good thing for us more than once let me tell you."

Slowly and noiselessly the *Falcon* rose into the darkness and Jim turned on the power which set in motion the forward propeller and headed for the cove. It was so dark that they could see but a few feet ahead and he knew that it would require all his skill and not a little luck to make a safe landing. While flying over the shore line that afternoon he had picked out the place, as even then he had had the idea of a night search in mind, but it was a question if he would be able to locate it in the darkness. He fully realized that they were in all probability on a vain errand so far as results were concerned, but for boys of their temperament it

was necessary that they do something toward finding their chum and this was the only thing he had been able to think of, unpromising as it was.

He had seen a small collection of huts only about a quarter of a mile from the shore and that was his goal. He figured that there was a chance Slim had been taken there and if so they might be able to free him. Anyhow he had deemed it a chance worth taking.

"We ought to be about there," Gordon suggested a few minutes after they had started.

"Can you see anything?" Jim asked as he slowed down the motor and started the elevator.

"Not much, but—yes, I can see the cliffs now and the cove is just to the right. Turn her a bit more. That's right, now slow."

The plane was now barely moving and a moment later Jim began slowing down the elevator.

"Watch it closely now," he ordered. "We don't want to land in a tree or something."

"I think we're hitting it all right," Gordon assured him, and a moment later the plane hit the ground softly and they jumped out to find

that they had landed on a sandy beach only a few feet from the water's edge.

"Think it's safe to leave her here?" Gordon asked.

"I guess so," Jim told him. "The tide's just started to go out so she won't wash away, and I reckon there won't be anyone around here before we get back."

"Do you know where we're going?"

"I know where we're going to try to go. Didn't you notice that little village about a quarter of a mile in?"

"I think so. You think he's been taken there?"

"It's no good to think but it's as likely there as anywhere, I suppose."

"All right, let's get going."

"Keep right close to me and don't make any noise. Some of these natives have mighty sharp ears I've read, and we don't want to advertise that we're coming."

"Mum's the word."

The beach ended about a hundred feet from the shore line in a thicket of woods and the undergrowth was so dense that they found at once that their progress would be very slow. They had brought flashlights but did not dare

use them lest they betray their presence to some prowling native. It was as dark as the proverbial pitch and they had to literally feel their way step by step. They were more afraid of snakes than anything else and expected every minute to step on one or to feel one drop around their necks. But nothing of the sort happened, and after what seemed hours, they emerged into a clearing which Jim remembered to be about a half a mile across, but the huts were only a few hundred feet from where they stood listening.

"Hear anything?" Jim whispered.

"Not a thing, do you?"

"No, and what's more I can't see anything either, but I'm sure we're right and that those huts are directly in front of us. I reckon they go to bed early around here."

"Well, we aren't going to find out much about it standing here."

They started off, with Jim, as usual, taking the lead. Although the woods had ended the ground was very rough and they were obliged to go slowly feeling their way with the utmost care. The sky was overcast and the darkness remained intense and only Jim's wonderful

sense of direction enabled them to keep anything like a straight course. They had covered something over a hundred yards when, a short distance in front of them, they heard a dog bark.

"Can you beat it?" Jim whispered stopping short in his tracks.

"Think he heard us?" Gordon whispered back.

"What difference does it make whether he did or didn't? He will before we can get very near and we'll be duck soup."

"But we can't give up now just on account of a dog."

"Who said anything about giving up. Come on but don't make a sound."

Jim still led the way with Gordon close to his heels. The dog did not bark again and after a few minutes had passed they breathed more easily thinking that it might have been a stray animal and hoping that it had gone off somewhere. Every few feet they stopped and listened but they heard nothing and finally Jim's outstretched hand came in contact with the side of one of the huts. At least he judged that was what it was. He whispered a low warning and

stood with his head close to the wall which he judged to be made of some kind of mud or clay. At first he could hear nothing but after a moment he fancied that he could catch the sound of deep breathing.

"We've arrived," he whispered, his lips close to Gordon's ear.

"What's the next move? Is there anyone in there?" Gordon asked.

"I think so, but I'm not certain. What do you think we'd better do?"

"Search me."

After waiting a moment longer Jim took Gordon by the hand and they stole softly around the back of the hut and then went on in the direction which they judged would take them toward the center of the village. The huts were only a few feet apart and they were obliged to make frequent detours to avoid them. Several times they stopped and listened with their ears pressed close against the wall of a hut and each time the low sound of breathing told them that it was occupied. But aside from that absolute silence prevailed and they were sure that everyone in the village was asleep.

"Seems to me we must be pretty near across the city," Jim whispered.

"And nothing has happened," Gordon replied in a tone of disgust.

"Perhaps we'll have better luck before long," Jim told him as he started off again.

For a distance of several yards they encountered nothing in the shape of a hut and soon came to the conclusion that they had gone entirely through the village. So they turned back going a bit to the right and soon ran against a dwelling which seemed to be considerably larger than the others. Jim's hand had touched a corner and he carefully felt his way around until he had turned three corners and came to the door.

The door was of wood and was closed but he did not dare try it to ascertain if it was fastened. He pressed his ear close against it and listened. At first he heard nothing, but after a minute, someone moved within and he heard a low but distinct grunt as though one were making a violent effort.

"Press your ear right here," he whispered. "Hear anything?"

"There's somebody in there and he isn't

asleep," Gordon whispered after listening for a moment.

"Slim?"

"Maybe."

"Get your gun and light ready because I'm going to see if this door will open."

"Let's go."

Jim had already learned that there was no knob or latch on the door, so at the word from Gordon, he pressed gently against it. To his surprise it swung open easily and with only a slight creak and after a moment's waiting they stepped inside and again listened. A loud grunt told them that the occupant was awake and another grunt made it certain that he was straining desperately at something. At a nudge from Jim Gordon suddenly flashed his light and their hearts jumped as they realized that their search was ended.

In one corner of the hut on the dirt floor lay Slim bound hand and foot, and as his eyes blinked in the sudden light, he made so comical a spectacle that it was all Jim could do to keep from laughing.

"I thought you'd come," Slim whispered.

"Souse that light," Jim ordered as he drew

his knife from his pocket and began cutting the cords with which the boy was tied.

"Did you—" Slim began, but Jim stopped him.

"Don't ask any questions now," he whispered. "We've got to get away just as soon as we can, and questions can wait till we have more time."

"There's somebody outside," Gordon whispered.

He was standing nearer the door and his sharp ear had caught a sound. He had pushed the door shut as he entered the hut and he hoped that whoever it might be he would pass without entering. Slim got to his feet as soon as his bonds were free and they stood hardly daring to breathe. In a moment they heard voices outside the hut and knew that there were at least two men there, perhaps more. Jim and Gordon had moved silently toward the door and were standing close by it, one on either side, as it swung open. Both had their flashlights in their left hands and as two negroes entered the hut they were met by a bright flare which, for the instant, dazzled their eyes.

That instant was enough to enable them to each pick his man and two right fists smashed

into an equal number of jaws and two darkies had the surprise of their lives. Neither of them was knocked down but before they could collect their senses the three boys were out of the hut and making their way toward the woods at as fast a pace as they dared risk in the darkness. Behind them they could hear the two men shouting and before they had gone a hundred feet other cries were added to them.

Once Slim stubbed his toe against a stone and tumbled flat, knocking the wind from his body and they were obliged to wait until he could get it back. Then Gordon, who was close behind Jim, accidentally tripped him and they both sprawled on the ground. But, fortunately, neither was hurt and they got quickly to their feet and hurried on with the loss of but a minute or two. But they knew that the chase was after them and the sound of running feet spurred them on to a speed faster than was safe in the darkness. They did not dare use their flashlights for fear that they would be intercepted by some of the tribe who, hearing the tumult, had doubtless come out of their huts between them and the woods. As it was they expected every minute to run into some of them.

And they did. Jim was leading, with Gordon close behind him and Slim bringing up the rear, when, without the slightest warning, he bumped into a solid mass of flesh. The boys were running at a good speed at the time, and all four, including the black man, went down in a struggling heap together. It would be hard to say who was the most scared of the four. The negro gave vent to a loud grunt as Jim's body hit him and he continued to grunt as he rolled about beneath the three boys trying desperately to free himself of the incubus.

All the time Jim was aware that the shouts were increasing in volume and knew that capture was inevitable unless they got started again without loss of time. He was on top of the heap and sprang to his feet, grabbing the fellow beneath him by the collar and dragging him up with him. He knew that it was Slim and as soon as that individual was on his feet he reached for Gordon. But, at the moment, Gordon was beneath the negro and Jim had to grab him around the neck and exert all his strength to pry him off.

"Make it snappy, now," he whispered as

Gordon crawled from beneath the mountain of flesh.

"After you," Gordon gasped.

They started on the run, aware that the pack was only a few yards away, but they also knew that they were not far from the woods, and in a moment they had reached them without further mishap. Jim, as usual, was leading the way and as he entered the thick woods he flashed his light for a moment.

"Keep close," he called back over his shoulder.

"Better keep your light on and risk it," Gordon advised, "we'll break our necks if you don't."

Jim knew that the advice was good for it was impossible to make any kind of speed in the darkness and he well knew that the natives would be able to go three feet to their one unless they had a light. So he kept his light on as he led the way trying to pick the easiest course. But there was very little choice as the dense undergrowth was everywhere. He could hear Slim panting behind him and knew that the fat boy was having all he could do to keep up, but

he hesitated to slacken his pace for now he could hear a crashing in the woods behind them and knew that some of the natives were following them. Gordon was bringing up the rear and Jim knew that he would let him know in case Slim should give out. So he continued to crash his way through the dense woods, now making a few feet with comparative ease, and again having to literally force his way through a particularly dense growth.

Once he stepped on something soft and shuddered as he felt a squirming body beneath his feet. Every second for what seemed ages he expected to feel the sharp fangs of the snake in one of his legs but fortunately it was either a harmless reptile or it did not get a chance to strike.

The sweat was pouring from his body as the night was hot and in the dense woods there seemed to be a lack of air, and he feared lest Slim would not be able to hold out until they fought through. And all the time their pursuers were gaining on them as was evident by the sounds which were all the time coming nearer. How many there were in the pursuing

party they could only guess but it was fair to suppose that a good part of the village had joined in the chase. Jim's wind was rapidly giving out and he knew that Slim, with his amount of surplus flesh, must be near the end of his endurance. But the edge of the woods could not be far away, he told himself, as he tried in vain to make better time.

Then he heard a tremendous crash close behind him and knew that Slim had tripped and gone down. Instantly he turned and threw his light back and saw Slim lying face down, his breath coming in heavy gasps. Gordon was already bending over him.

"You g-go on," Slim gasped.

"Cut it out," Gordon snapped. "Are you hurt?"

"N-no, but I c-can't go any farther."

"Sure you can," Jim told him, getting his hands beneath his shoulders.

Slim made a tremendous effort to get to his feet and finally succeeded, but it was evident to both Jim and Gordon that he was in no condition to proceed. Again Slim begged them to leave him and save themselves, but they cut him

short, and Jim said as he pulled his automatic from his pocket:

"We probably couldn't have made it anyhow and might as well have it out here as anywhere."

CHAPTER VIII

A TERRIFYING ADVENTURE

"They'll be here in a minute," Gordon declared in a low tone. "Are we going to shoot?"

"I don't want to kill any of them if we can help it," Jim told him. "But we mustn't let them get us."

From the sound it seemed to the boys that an army was crashing through the woods. Shouts and yells echoed and the snapping of sticks, now plainly audible, told them that the natives were making no effort to keep their whereabouts secret.

"Fire a couple of times over their heads," Jim ordered when it was certain that they were only a few yards away.

Slim was, of course, unarmed, but Jim and Gordon aimed high in the air and each fired two shots. Instantly almost the shouting ceased and, for a moment, all was silence.

"Maybe that'll hold 'em," Gordon whispered.

"And maybe it won't" Jim replied as the shouts began again.

But a moment later it was evident that they had a very profound respect for fire-arms. The shouting rapidly died away and the boys knew that they were hurrying back through the woods to the village.

"We might have saved ourselves a whole lot of trouble if we'd fired the guns in the first place," Gordon snorted.

"We could save ourselves a lot of trouble lots of times if we could only see ahead," Jim told him. "How about it, Slim? Can you go on now? I'm none too easy in my mind about those fellows."

"What do you mean?" Gordon asked. "They'd jump a mile if you said boo to them."

"Maybe and maybe not," Jim shook his head. "Oh, I'll agree that the rank and file of them were scared but there may be one or two who aren't, and then again it may be all a trick."

"What do you mean, trick?"

"Well, they evidently have some respect for guns and figured that if they kept on some of them would get hurt and—"

"Exactly."

"And so they're trying some plan safer to themselves. I'm only guessing of course, but if Slim is all right my advice is that we get back to the plane pronto."

"I'm all right," Slim declared, and Jim at once took up the march again.

They were nearer the edge of the woods than they thought and ten minutes later they reached the plane which stood where they had left it. Jim heaved a sigh of relief when he found that the plane had not been molested for he had greatly feared that some of the natives might have found it, in which case he realized that they would be in very great danger.

"How come you found me?" Slim asked a little later when they were safe on the boat.

"Well, I reckon it was more good luck than anything else," Jim told him. "We hadn't much hope to tell the truth after we'd flown all over the island, but it was a natural thing to suppose that you had been taken to one of the villages and of course we tried the nearest one first. That habit you have of grunting came in very handy. If we hadn't heard that we might

never have found you. I advise that you cultivate it."

"I believe I will," Slim laughed.

"But how did they get you without any fuss?" Gordon asked.

"Easy," Slim grinned. "You see, after you went down I got sleepy and the next thing I knew three of the big brutes had me and I didn't have a chance to put up a scrap. They paddled ashore in a canoe and hid it in a clump of bushes and—"

"Is there a path through those woods?" Jim interrupted.

"Sure there is, but I wouldn't be able to find it in the dark."

"Well, go on," Gordon ordered as Slim paused.

"There isn't much of anything more to tell. They didn't talk any lingo that I could understand, so I couldn't find out what they wanted. They tied me up good and fast and threw me in that hut and that's about all."

"Didn't they give you anything to eat?" Jim asked.

"Not a mouthful."

"No wonder you gave out. Now you sit still

and I'll get you something in less than two shakes of a dog's tail," Jim told him as he jumped to his feet. "No," he added, as Gordon started to follow him, "you stay here and keep an eye open. Those fellows may be up to something yet. I don't trust 'em, not any."

"I can eat a bite myself," Gordon called after him.

"I'll get enough for all of us," Jim promised.

Half an hour later after they had eaten a good meal they were in better spirits and Jim ordered the others to bed.

"We've got to keep watch all the time now," he explained. "It's just a few minutes to twelve now and I'll call you, Gordon, at three o'clock."

"How about me?" Slim demanded.

"You're out of it to-night," Jim told him.

The sky was still clouded over and the darkness was as intense as ever when, finally, Jim was left alone on the little deck, and he knew he would have to trust to his ears rather than to his eyes to guard against an attack. Not that he really expected one, but he always believed in taking every possible precaution against danger. He had put out all the lights as soon as the others had turned in and as he paced

back and forth he could barely see the pilot house.

Almost at once his thoughts turned to the morrow. How would they be able to plan things so as to be safe now that the natives knew they were there and undoubtedly had evil designs on them? He did not like the idea of one of them going down alone and it seemed almost equally unsafe for one of them to remain alone on the boat. In case the natives should make another attempt against them there would be no way in which the one on the boat could communicate with those below. It was, he decided, a fool thing in the first place to think that they would be able to find a wreck which had been under the water so many years. And yet, he would, he knew, be loath to be driven away, and he was quite certain that Gordon and Slim would not listen to such an argument.

An hour passed and he had heard nothing. He was having hard work to keep awake and, as he glanced at the luminous face of his watch, it seemed to him that time never passed so slowly before. He tried sitting down on the deck but very soon his head began to nod and he was afraid to risk it. So he got to his feet

and again began pacing back and forth until a slight splash off the port bow brought him quickly to the rail. It had sounded like a careless stroke of a paddle and he tried to pierce the darkness with his eyes, believing that the natives were about to make another attack on the boat.

But, as the minutes passed, and the sound was not repeated, he concluded that it must have been a fish breaking water he had heard. Or perhaps he had imagined it. At times like the present he was well aware that one's imagination is likely to play strange tricks and one often hears and sees things which have no real existence. He had not expected that the natives would make an attack on them that night as it had been evident that they were in fear of their guns and they would know that they would not leave the boat unguarded. He knew that their way was usually the way of stealth rather than of open attack.

He called Gordon at the appointed time and reported everything quiet, and was sound asleep as soon as his head touched his pillow. The sun was up when Gordon called him for breakfast and Slim was already eating.

"Why didn't you let me sleep all day," he demanded as he emerged from the cabin.

"Nothing like getting your beauty sleep," Slim laughed.

"It's only five o'clock," Gordon told him.

After breakfast was over Jim called for a council of war, as he called it.

"It looks to me," he told them, "as though we were licked."

"What do you mean, licked?" Gordon snorted. "Why, we haven't begun to fight yet."

"But I don't believe in fighting when you haven't a chance," Jim declared.

"Haven't a chance? How come?" Slim demanded.

"Think it over," Jim counseled. "There's only three of us, and that means that one of us has to be alone either on board or below and with no way of communicating with the others."

"That's right too," Gordon agreed, "but you don't mean that we're going to let a few half-baked darkies scare us away, do you? Jim, I'm plumb ashamed of you."

"Hold your horses, hombre," Jim smiled. "I just wanted to put it up to you in its worst light. But, seriously, fellows, we've got to

figure the thing out before we go ahead. Why do you suppose they kidnapped you, Slim?"

"Search me," Slim shook his head. "These darkies on these small islands have the reputation of being an onery bunch and had rather steal a thing than get it honestly even if it means more trouble."

"Then you think they stole you just for the sake of stealing something?" Gordon asked. "If you ask me," he added before Slim could reply, "I'd say they showed mighty poor judgment with so many other things lying around that they might have taken. Why didn't they take our grub?"

"Didn't I tell you you could search me?" Slim retorted. "That means that I don't know anything about it. Can you understand that?"

"I get you," Gordon grinned.

"What I'd like to know," Jim said after a short pause in the conversation, "is whether they know anything about this wreck we're hunting after, and if they do, are they trying to drive us away for fear we'll find it."

"I don't believe they know anything about it," Slim told him. "They're too ignorant to know much about anything, except how to tie a

fellow up so that he can't get away. They know how to do that all right. But I really think that we're letting our fears run away with us. I believe one of us, with the two rifles we've got aboard, could keep off all the natives there are on the island. I really don't think there's any danger. If I hadn't been asleep they never would have gotten on board. You can bet on that."

"Perhaps you're right," Jim said soberly, "but if we go ahead on that assumption and it's wrong we'll—"

"Be out of luck," Gordon finished for him. "But I believe Slim's right. Anyhow I vote that we go ahead just as we've been doing except that the fellow on board must keep awake."

"It's the only thing we can do if we're to go on," Jim agreed. "But I wish there was some way we could fix up so that we could signal in case of trouble."

"The only way would be to use a rope and that's not at all practical," Slim told them. "I went to sleep last time and got pinched, so I'm going to take the first watch on board to-day and if they get me again I'll deserve all that's

coming to me and I don't want you to hunt for me."

They weighed anchor soon after and moved the customary distance nearer the point, and Jim and Gordon donned the suits.

"If anything should happen," Jim said just before screwing on his helmet, "you pull up the anchor and start the engine and keep out of their way. You can easily pick us up afterward."

"Now don't you worry about me," Slim told him. "They'll not catch me napping again."

But as Jim sank slowly down through the water his mind was filled with misgivings. It was all very well to assume things, he told himself, but assumptions often went wrong and in case this one followed that course the result might well be serious.

The bed where they landed was of the usual firmness of sand and there was but little of the under-sea growth in sight, and they started off side by side toward the point looking on all sides as they walked. As always myriads of small fish of all shapes swam about them as though wondering what strange creatures were these who had invaded their domain. Jim never

tired of studying them and noting each new specimen.

They had been walking along for a matter of ten minutes when Gordon suddenly grabbed Jim by the arm and pointed off to their right. Seen dimly through the water a huge form reared itself to a height of twenty feet or more. At first Jim thought they had come to the end of their search and followed Gordon as fast as he could go. But, as they approached he soon saw his mistake. It was no wreck but a huge formation of coral rock and in its center appeared an opening some twenty feet wide and about ten feet high.

"Seems a funny place for a cave," Jim said to himself, "but you never know what you're going to find down under the water."

Gordon was, at the moment, standing directly in front of the cave and about ten feet from Jim when suddenly a long arm shot out and wrapped itself around Gordon's leg. Jim saw the boy brace himself to resist the tug which came immediately, but in spite of his effort he was being drawn slowly but surely into the hole. It seemed a nightmare to Jim as he drew his knife and hurried forward. How the water

pressed against him and retarded his speed. His feet seemed like slabs of lead so heavy were they. He could see Gordon frantically slashing at the tentacle with his knife but could not see that he was accomplishing anything. He seemed more or less paralyzed and his efforts seemed woefully weak. Although it seemed to the boy a long time it was but a few seconds before he had reached his side and grabbed him in his arms just as he was about to fall.

Jim's aid seemed to inspire Gordon with renewed strength but their combined efforts were helpless to resist that relentless pull and Jim, reaching forward, succeeded in cutting a long gash in the clinging arm. It was not successful, however, in severing it and instead a second arm shot out and caught Jim around his right leg. They could see nothing but the arms which held them so dark was it in the opening but both knew that unless they freed themselves almost instantly a fearful death awaited them. Inch by inch they were being drawn nearer to the loathsome body which they knew could be but a few feet away. Jim was slashing with his knife at the tentacle which was wrapped about his leg and all but dragging him from his feet,

but it was so tough that it was difficult to make any impression on it.

Then he glanced up and to his horror saw, not ten feet away, a huge shape with a parrot-like beak seeming to be gloating over its anticipated meal. The sight froze his blood but it gave him the needed strength to inflict a slash which completely severed the arm and he drew back dragging Gordon after him. But the arm which held Gordon tightened and for a second it was a tie. But the slash which he had inflicted had sapped the strength of the tentacle and slowly it began to slip and in an instant they were free. Hurriedly as possible they fled from the spot, Jim leading his brother by the hand. He could see through the glass plate that Gordon's face was deadly pale and knew that he was about at the limit of his strength.

It had been, he realized, a very close call and he thanked God that he had been able to save them both. Gordon stumbled several times and Jim was forced at last to put his arm around him and hold him up before they finally reached the place where they saw the anchor rope.

It took the combined efforts of both Jim and

Slim to get Gordon on the boat and he fainted before they could get his helmet off.

"What happened," Slim asked as he began rubbing his wrists, while Jim sopped cold water on his face.

"Devil fish, and it all but got us," Jim told him.

"Big one?"

"Big enough. I thought it was all up with us."

Just then Gordon opened his eyes and smiled, and a moment later they had him lying in his bunk, but declaring that he was all right.

"Sure you're all right," Jim assured him, "but you're going to take it easy for awhile just the same."

"Y-you saved my life," Gordon smiled.

"It was nothing," Jim assured him.

"The dickens it wasn't."

"I don't mean your life," Jim told him.

"I'll never get that sight out of my mind," Gordon murmured as he closed his eyes.

He fell asleep almost at once and the others tiptoed from the cabin.

"Tell me all about it," Slim demanded as they

reached the deck. "It must have been pretty terrible."

"It was," Jim assured him, and proceeded to tell him all about the adventure.

"I'll say you had a close one," Slim said when he had finished.

CHAPTER IX

AN ATTACK

"See anything of any natives?" Jim asked as, awhile later, they started getting dinner.

"Haven't seen a thing," Slim told him. "I've a hunch that they won't bother us any more. Knowing that we're armed and on the watch will greatly discourage them."

"I hope you're right and I guess maybe you are, but we can't be sure as long as we stay here."

"They won't catch me napping again if that's what you mean," Slim asserted with a good deal of warmth.

"They mustn't catch any of us napping," Jim smiled.

Gordon slept until dinner was ready and then declared that he was as well as ever. "A body might think I was a silly little girl fainting that way," he declared disgustedly.

"That was as good a way to faint as any other," Slim told him.

"And what you went through was enough to make anyone faint," Jim added.

"But you didn't."

"Well, it wouldn't have done for both of us to get weak-kneed at the same time, you know. I'll probably have my turn next time."

"Here's hoping there'll never be a next time like that," Slim told them. "But what are we going to do about that devil down there."

"I wish there was some way we could get rid of him," Gordon declared. "I'll never feel safe again knowing that he's around."

"But I don't imagine he ever goes very far from that cave," Jim said. "Anyhow I don't know how we could do it without a stick of dynamite. If we had that I guess we could settle his hash in short order."

"Well, I'll probably get over it but I don't think I care about going down again to-day," Gordon asserted.

"I should say not, and neither do I for that matter," Jim agreed.

"Then we'll declare a holiday for the rest of the day and take a ride in the plane instead,"

Slim suggested, and they all agreed that it was a good idea.

"That devil can't get us up in the air," Gordon declared.

They hurried with the dishes, anxious to get their minds off the terrible experience of the forenoon, and soon they were flying high above the island in a cloudless sky. As they soared ten thousand feet in the air Gordon spied another island directly ahead and, pointing it out to Jim, suggested that they fly over it.

"That must be Dominica," Jim said as he increased their speed slightly.

They flew over the island but saw nothing of particular interest and returned shortly after three o'clock to find two canoes filled with natives paddling for all they were worth toward the *Betty Ann*. Gordon spied them first and called Jim's attention to them when they were about ten miles off.

"We never should have left the boat without a guard," Jim snapped as he pushed the switch over a couple of notches.

"We'll get there in time," Gordon told him.

"Got your gun in your pocket?" Jim asked.

"Sure I have. How about you?"

"I left mine on the boat. How about you, Slim," Jim asked turning his head.

"I left mine there too," Slim replied a bit sheepishly.

"Well, I guess one'll be enough," Jim told them. "But it's mighty lucky that Gordon has his with him. It's going to be nip and tuck who gets there first."

"I don't think they've seen us," Slim declared.

"They'll hear something before long," Gordon grinned as he drew his automatic from his pocket.

The plane was about a thousand feet in the air and almost up to the boats. The canoes, each carrying six natives, were alongside when Gordon fired. As the shot rang out all the natives looked up in alarm and one canoe was almost instantly upset as the crew ducked their heads as if to dodge the bullet. The occupants of the other canoe were more fortunate and sheered off without upsetting, and darted away toward the shore.

The upset canoe floated bottom side up while six woolly heads dotted the water. But a moment later they gave an exhibition which sur-

prised the boys. Almost instantly the canoe was righted and the six men scrambled aboard in a manner which displayed rare expertness.

"Give them another shot," Jim suggested, as the plane swung around and dipped toward them.

"How about putting a hole in the boat?" Gordon asked.

"Too many sharks around," Jim told him. "We don't want to kill any of them."

"Serve 'em right if a shark ate the whole bunch," Gordon declared.

"I reckon more than one of those tough babies taken at a meal would give any shark a terrible tummy ache," Slim laughed as Gordon fired a second shot.

"It's lucky we came back when we did," Jim told them as they boarded the boat a few minutes later. "Five minutes more and they'd have been on board and they might have wrecked things. It was very careless of us to leave all at the same time and we mustn't do it again."

"You bet we won't," Slim agreed.

"The question that's puzzling me is whether or not those guys knew we were away," Gordon said. "If they saw us leaving why didn't they

come out sooner, and if they didn't—well, that means they intended to make a fight of it."

"I doubt it," Slim told him. "I figure it this way. They caught me asleep once and probably thought they could do it again. You want to remember that they're not overburdened with gray matter in their heads, and they likely figured that we've forgotten all about that other time. Of course I may be all wrong."

"And probably are," Jim smiled. "No, I guess they saw us go away all right, and probably it took them some time to get their gang together."

"Which means that neither of you knows a thing about it," Gordon interrupted. "Those babies may be dumb and then again they may be smarter than we think."

"Well, what's your version?" Jim asked.

"Haven't any. Of course when you're guessing one guess is as good as another, but I don't believe in guessing, except when—"

"You're doing it," Jim interrupted laughingly.

That night they watched in three hour shifts but nothing happened, and after breakfast it was decided that Jim and Slim should go down.

Gordon insisted that he was all right and had forgotten all about the devil fish. But Jim reminded him that it was Slim's turn and he did not argue the matter. So, after moving the boat a short distance, they donned the suits and were soon on the bottom hunting for the lost wreck. As his feet touched the sand Jim looked all around to see if he could see the cave where they had had their terrible experience, but it was not in sight and he reasoned that they were far enough away to be safe so far as that particular devil fish was concerned.

Left alone on the boat Gordon looked about for some way in which to occupy his time. He remembered that in the cabin was a small book case and ten minutes after Jim and Slim had disappeared over the side he was examining the few books it contained. He selected one which he thought he might like and settling himself in a deck chair on the side toward the island he was soon deeply interested in one of Henty's tales. But he did not neglect his watch and every few minutes glanced up from the book and scanned the ocean on all sides.

It was almost a perfect calm and the sun, shining down from a cloudless sky, was very

hot, but beneath the awning it was not unbearable and he was so interested in the story that he forgot the heat. He had been reading for a half hour or a little more when his eye caught sight of something which brought him quickly to his feet. Snatching up the glass he trained it on the moving object which was close to the shore and, as he expected, saw that there were no less than a half dozen canoes filled with natives and they were coming toward the boat.

"Looks like trouble," he muttered as he closed the book, and disappeared in the cabin to return almost at once, a rifle in his hands.

The boat was about a half a mile from the shore at the time but there was a haze in the air which made vision very indistinct and without the glass he could barely see the canoes. But the glass told him that they were coming rapidly, each boat being propelled by six paddles and he knew that it would be but a few minutes when they would be alongside. Would he be able to scare them off again with the rifle? He asked himself the question and shook his head in answer. The fact that they were coming out in such force seemed to indicate that they meant business and he did not want to

shoot any of them. But, he told himself, he would be obliged to in case they did not scare.

One other course remained. He could pull up anchor and start the engine and in that way keep out of their way. But there was the question of Jim and Slim. True Jim had told him to do that very thing in case of need but all the same he hesitated. Finally he decided that he would wait and see what the effect of a few shots from the rifle would be. It would, he knew, take him but a few minutes to raise the anchor and get under way. Yes, he would wait and see.

By this time the six canoes were within a quarter of a mile and he could see the paddlers plying their paddles with great rapidity. It would not do, he told himself, to let them come much nearer, and he decided to shoot. But a half dozen shots had no effect so far as he could see as the canoes kept on and he was obliged to confess that there was nothing to do but run.

Raising the anchor alone was hard work but he got it up with the nearest canoe still a hundred yards away, and hurried to the engine room. Suppose it shouldn't start, he thought as he pressed the starter. But the engine began to purr at once and, setting the indicator

at about quarter speed, he returned to the deck. The nearest of the canoes was only a few yards away and he could see that the natives were exerting themselves to the utmost as they tried to reach the boat before it gathered speed. But the boat was already moving faster than they could paddle and Gordon heaved a sigh of relief as he grasped the wheel and gave it a short turn to the right.

"I wasn't a whole lot too quick at that," he muttered. "Those fellows sure do know how to paddle a canoe."

From the little window of the pilot-house he could see that the natives were still chasing him and he smiled at the futility of their efforts. He was pretty certain that they had no fire-arms and he did not want to get any farther away from the place where the boat had been anchored than was absolutely necessary for there was no telling how soon Jim and Slim would come to the surface and he did not propose to leave them to the tender mercies of the natives.

It was true that they would in all probability be in little danger as they could go down again by merely letting the air out of their suits. But there was always the chance that they might

come up so near one of the canoes that they would be captured before they could sink out of sight. So he steered the boat in a circle, keeping but a short distance from the nearest of the canoes. Seeing that they were holding their own the natives put on an extra burst of speed, evidently thinking that the boat was going as fast as possible, and Gordon was obliged to leave the wheel long enough to go to the engine-room and speed up a bit. When he returned in a couple of minutes he noted that the distance between them had increased slightly and smiled as he watched their efforts to get nearer. But they were already putting forth their best skill and the space between them widened rather than lessened.

The canoes were strung out for a distance of some hundred yards or more and before long he saw that two of the rear ones were cutting across in an effort to head him off. A slight turn of the wheel sufficed to avert that catastrophe and he again laughed as he saw the rage on their faces when they perceived that he was on to their ruse.

"They must think I'm dumb," he chuckled.

So for the better part of an hour he played

tag with them and could not help admiring their persistency for never for a minute did they give up the chase. He knew that it was about time for the two boys to return and kept his eyes on the water all around to catch the first sight of one of their heads as it popped above the water. From the absence of the anchor they would, of course, guess what had happened, but he knew Jim well enough to feel sure that it would not keep him down long. He judged that he had kept within a radius of a quarter of a mile of the place where the boat had been anchored, and as the sea was as smooth as a mill pond, he was quite certain that he would be able to see them when they came up.

And he was right, for a few minutes later his sharp eyes saw a helmeted head bob up about three hundred feet to his right, followed almost at once by another. But the two heads were only about a hundred feet from one of the canoes which, at the moment, was cutting across in another effort to intercept him, and the two divers were between him and the canoe. Short as was the distance he knew that the canoe would reach them first at his present rate of

speed and he would lose precious time in going to the engine-room to put on more.

A quick turn of the wheel swung the boat around until it was headed in the right direction, and grabbing up one of the rifles, he sprang out of the pilot house. The canoe had turned and was now only a few feet from the nearest head and in the bow stood a native and in his hand was a huge spear. Taking quick aim he fired and was gratified when the man fell over backward into the canoe. But another sprang to take his place and he was obliged to fire again and again the shot took effect. And this time no one took his place. Evidently they had had enough of that kind of shooting.

But the canoe came on with undiminished speed and again he fired, aiming this time at the bow just below the water line. He was unable to tell if the shot took effect for at that instant the canoe turned and he saw one of the natives reach out a hand to grasp the helmet. But, to his great joy, the diver sank just before he could reach it and, at practically the same time, the other one also vanished beneath the surface.

"It's about time I taught those fellows a lesson," Gordon snapped as he dropped the rifle

and ran for the engine-room. He was back in less than half a minute but even in that short space of time the *Betty Ann* had picked up considerable speed. The canoe was about seventy-five feet ahead of him and he steered directly for it. The natives, seeing the boat coming for them, bent to their paddles, but a moment later the sharp bow of the boat struck them, and although it was a glancing blow, the canoe was overturned.

"Maybe that'll hold 'em for a while," Gordon chuckled as he gave a sharp turn to the wheel.

The rest of the canoes had been too far away to take any part in the fracas but Gordon saw that they were now speeding toward the overturned craft and for an instant he was undecided whether or not to run down another of them. But he decided against it and hurried to the engine-room to cut down the speed. When he returned to the deck he saw that three of the canoes were picking up the swimming natives and as soon as this was accomplished they headed for the island.

"Guess it was a good lesson," he chuckled as he gave a sharp turn to the wheel.

He was pretty sure that the two heads would bob up again before long and was not disappointed for in a few minutes he saw them only a short distance ahead. Five minutes later they were stripping off their suits.

"What did you do to them?" Jim asked as soon as his helmet was off.

"Shot a couple of them and then ran down their canoe," Gordon told him.

"Did you kill them?" Slim asked.

"No, I was lucky enough to hit their hands both times, the hands which held the big spears they were going to harpoon you with."

"I'm glad you didn't kill any of them," Jim told him.

"Been no more than they deserved," Gordon declared.

"Maybe," Jim told them, "but you've got to remember one thing, they're not educated and they don't like us and don't know what we're up to."

"Maybe they don't and then again maybe they do," Slim broke in, "but I reckon you're dead right about them not liking us."

"I wouldn't say that they've expressed any

great affection in our direction if you inquire from me," Gordon grinned. "That big guy with the spear looked to me as though he'd like to kill us and all our ancestors."

"Except those that are dead already," Jim laughed.

"By the way," Gordon demanded, "did you find anything while you were down?"

"We did," Jim replied.

"You did?"

"You heard me the first time. We've located the wreck, or at least a wreck, and we believe it's the right one."

"Where abouts?"

"Up in the clouds," Slim laughed. "No, but honest injun we've found it only its pretty nearly buried in the sand and it's going to be some job to get at it."

"Didn't find any name on it, did you?"

"Nope, but we didn't expect to."

"Well, after dinner I suppose I'll have to go down and give it the once over and see if you're being fooled," Gordon told them.

"No doubt your opinion will settle the matter," Slim gibed.

"I hope to tell you it will," Gordon laughed as he started toward the galley. "I'm the last word on sunken ships and I don't mean perhaps," he flung back as he disappeared through the doorway.

CHAPTER X

THE WRECK

It took Jim and Slim a few minutes to locate, as nearly as they were able, the place where the boat had been anchored before the attack.

"I'd say it was about here," Jim declared as he gave the wheel a slight turn to the left.

"I'll stop her then and you can let down the anchor," Slim called back from the door of the engine room.

"Now I guess we'd better give Gordon a hand at getting dinner," Jim suggested as soon as the anchor had touched bottom. "It's only eleven o'clock but I know he's crazy to get down and have a look at it. Gee, but I hope we haven't made a mistake."

"I'll gamble we haven't," Slim assured him. "That wreck's been there a good many years and what's more it was burned. I could see that from the looks of the timbers."

"An indication but not a proof. Other ships have been burned besides that one, you know."

"Sure, but perhaps not right in this place."

"Well, we'll hope for the best."

"You bet. See anything of any of those canoes?"

"No, they've all reached the shore and gone in around that little point. Think they've had enough."

"They're hogs for punishment if they haven't, but I've a hunch we'll hear from them again."

"I wouldn't wonder if you're right. They seem to be persistent beggars."

"But what I can't understand is why they're so dead against us when we're not treading on their corns."

"Maybe we are at that," Jim said slowly as he started for the galley.

Dinner was over by half past twelve and it was decided that Slim should stand guard while Jim and Gordon went down to make a further examination of the wreck. Gordon was in so much of a hurry that he bolted his dinner so much faster than usual that Jim reminded him

several times that the wreck was not going to run away.

"But you've seen it and I haven't," he retorted.

"I know, but there's no sense in getting a case of chronic indigestion over it," Jim reminded him.

"I guess you're right at that," Gordon smiled as he began to clear away the dishes.

"You let the dishes alone and get going," Slim ordered. "I'll do them while you're down. Give me something to take up the time."

"I doubt if you'll see anything more of those natives to-day," Jim said as he started putting on his suit, "but if they should come out again don't take any chances. Just keep out of their way the way Gordon did. It's a lucky thing for us that they haven't any guns."

"They won't catch me, not if I see them first and that's what I intend to do," Slim promised.

A few minutes later the two boys went over the side of the boat and slowly sank through the green water to the sand below. Where they landed there was considerable growth and Jim knew at once that they had not anchored very near the right spot as it had been particularly

clear for some distance on all sides of the wreck. He thought however that he knew the right direction to go, and pointing so that Gordon could see, he struck off. The growth was so dense that they had trouble in making much headway and both boys were worried for fear a barracuda would get a bite at them. Several times, before they had gone a hundred feet, they saw small specimens of the dreaded fish dart from behind a shrub, but they made no attempt to attack them and after a bit they felt more comfortable.

Fifty feet further on the growth suddenly ceased and, in the distance, Jim saw the wreck. He grabbed Gordon by the arm and pointed and Gordon nodded in understanding. They were but a few minutes in reaching the place and at a glance Gordon understood why they had believed it to be the wreck for which they had been searching. It was, as they had said, largely buried in sand but there was enough of it in sight to enable him to see that it was the wreck of a ship of long ago, and there was no doubt that it had burned before it sank.

After walking all around it Gordon nodded his head as a sign that he agreed with them that

it probably was the ship. But he also agreed with them that it was going to be a long job getting inside. The ship was, of course, constructed wholly of wood and had burned close to the water's edge at the time of the fire and sand had drifted over a great part of the deck, leaving, so far as they could see, no way of easy ingress into the body of the ship. The bow was higher than the rest of the ship and for a distance of some thirty feet the deck was free of sand but there was no opening through it and the planking looked to be pretty solid in spite of the many years it had been under water.

The sides of the ship seemed to be wonderfully well preserved and Gordon shook his head as he felt them with his bare hand. But they both knew that there must be some way to get inside. It was not conceivable that they could give up now that they had found the object of their search, and both were thinking hard. Finally Jim signaled that they had better be getting back. He was a bit worried for fear that Slim might be having trouble with the natives and Gordon quickly agreed that they had been down long enough.

To their great joy they found everything all

right on the surface when their heads bobbed from the water only a few feet from the boat, and a few minutes later they had their suits off and had entered into a committee of the whole, as Gordon called it, to discuss ways and means.

"You think it's it?" Slim asked as soon as Gordon's helmet was off.

"Looks that way to me," Gordon told him.

"Then it must be so," Jim smiled. "Remember he's an authority on the subject of sunken pirate ships. Think of all the experience he's had."

"Cut out the kidding and let's get down to brass tacks," Gordon growled. "How we going to get inside her? That's the question before the house just at present."

"Only way I can see is to cut a hole through the deck," Slim suggested.

"Or shovel off a lot of sand," Jim added.

"And we haven't got the tools to do either. "How about a good charge of dynamite," Gordon suggested.

"Which we haven't got either," Jim laughed.

"Well, we can get it, can't we?" Gordon retorted.

"Where?"

"Why, in Havana, I suppose."

"Probably we can, but I was wondering if we couldn't get through that deck with a crow-bar," Jim mused.

"I imagine we could if we had the crow-bar," Gordon told him.

"And we probably could get a crow-bar a whole lot nearer than Havana."

"Or dynamite too, for that matter," Slim added.

"We're about a hundred miles from Martinique and about three hundred from San Juan, Porto Rico, and we undoubtedly could get a crow-bar in either place and dynamite in San Juan. I'm not so sure about getting dynamite in Martinique. What do you say?" Jim asked.

"My vote is that you or I take the plane and fly over to Martinique and get a crow-bar and a pick-axe and some dynamite if there's any to be had there. Then we can have a try at it and see what we can do?"

"Second the motion," Slim ordered.

"All right," Jim agreed. "It's three o'clock now. I ought to make it and get back by six."

"And have plenty of time to loaf on the way," Gordon told him.

"You fellows see to it that you have a good supper ready at six sharp," Jim added as he began pulling the plane toward the boat.

"Aye, aye, skipper," Slim saluted as Jim leaped to the plane and cast off the mooring line.

"And keep an eye open for trouble," Jim called as he turned on the power.

"You bet," Gordon assured him.

Straight up in the air the plane rose until it had reached an elevation of about three hundred feet and then Jim started the forward propeller and, after waving a hand to the boys below, headed southeast.

Gordon and Slim watched until the plane was a mere speck and then Gordon suggested that it would be a good plan to moor a buoy to locate the position of the wreck.

"It'll help kill the time and it might be a good thing," Sim agreed. "There's plenty of small rope in one of the lockers and we can use a small keg which I had for water. It's empty now that I've got that distilling apparatus. You get the line and I'll hunt up the keg. I think it's in one of the lockers in the galley."

They soon found the things and Slim added a

small anchor which he sometimes used with the tender and which he declared would be strong enough for the purpose.

"That wreck is just about three hundred feet in that direction," Gordon said pointing toward the east.

"Then I'll start the engine and we'll move over there. You steer and see how near you can come to hitting it."

"It'll be near enough, I reckon."

A few minutes later Gordon ordered the boat stopped and began letting down the anchor. "We'll be within shooting distance I'm pretty certain," he told Slim when the latter came from the engine-room and stood watching him.

"I reckon," Slim agreed.

Soon the anchor was on the bottom and they made the small keg secure to the end of the line and threw it over.

"Guess we might as well start getting supper," Gordon suggested after they had again anchored the boat. "Jim wasn't fooling when he said he'd expect a good one."

"You know him," Slim grinned, "and if he's as terrible as all that when he's hungry I reckon

I'd better get out a couple of cans of chicken. Does he love chicken?"

"Better make it three cans. I can eat one all by my lonesome."

"You're the doctor. Three it is. Can you make biscuits?"

"Can I?" You just watch me. Now if we were only up in the Maine woods I'd hunt up a good trout stream and I'd give you a meal what is a meal."

"What would be a meal, you mean."

"Have it your own way. Did you ever eat a brook trout cooked in the coals of a camp fire?"

"I've got that thrill still coming to me."

"Gee, but I envy you."

"If I ever get it."

"You'll get it all right the first time you come to Maine. Take it from me."

Jim was back a bit sooner than they expected but the biscuits were almost done and he declared they had more than made good their part of the bargain. As for him he brought back two crow-bars and two pick-axes but had been unable to get any dynamite.

"Oh, well, I reckon we won't need it with those tools," Gordon told them.

The night passed without incident and as soon as breakfast was over they started preparations for beginning work on the wreck. It was decided that Jim and Slim should take the first turn at the work although Gordon agreed reluctantly.

"Some fellows get all the breaks," he complained as Jim started putting on his suit.

"If I didn't know you I'd think you were complaining," Jim smiled. "But don't you worry about not getting plenty of chances to work. It's not going to be any soft job getting inside that wreck let me tell you and there'll be plenty of time."

"I suppose so," Gordon grinned, "but just the same my original remark stands."

"As a general proposition I'd say you were right," Slim broke in, "but in this particular case allow me to suggest that you're all wet."

" 'A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still'," Gordon quoted, with a smile which told both the others that he was only joking.

When they reached the bottom a few minutes later they found that the anchor was only about

fifty feet from the wreck and Jim nodded his head as a sign of a compliment on their skill. Slim waved his hand in token that he understood his meaning. Each boy had in his hands a crow-bar and a pick-axe and they hurriedly made their way to the wreck eager to begin operations. They had expected little or no difficulty in getting onto the deck of the old ship but they soon found that it was not quite so simple as they had anticipated. The sand, where it had drifted over the sides, was loose and they sank in farther than was comfortable as they endeavored to climb. But finally they reached the deck and set to work. With the tools they had, it would seem a simple matter to break up the planking which had been beneath the water for so many years. But working under water is an entirely different matter from doing the same job in the open air.

Almost at once they realized the futility of trying to start an opening with the pick-axes. Owing to the pressure of the water it was impossible to strike a blow that, as Slim afterward declared, would smash a fly. The crow-bars could be wielded to better advantage owing to

the downward stroke, but for a long time they were able to make but slight impression on the tough planks. Each blow would make a dent, to be sure, but they found it almost impossible to hit twice in the same place.

"If I hadn't been an absolute idiot I'd have brought along a big auger," Jim thought as the sweat poured down his face.

From the time the wreck had been discovered he had doubted that it was the one they were hunting. It did not seem possible to him that wood could be so wonderfully preserved after being in the water so many years. However, he had said nothing of the sort to the others, not wishing to dampen their enthusiasm. But now more than ever he felt sure that they were on the wrong ship. Still, he reasoned, there might well be something of value inside the hull even if it were not the right one. So no thought of abandoning the enterprise crossed his mind. He had paused for a moment to rest and was about to start in again when Slim, who was behind him, grasped him by the arm and pointed toward the place where they had landed. He could barely see the rope through the water, but

as his eyes followed it he saw that the anchor was being drawn rapidly upward.

Throwing down his bar he motioned to Slim, who was still holding him by the arm, and jumped from the deck. Slim quickly followed him and together they hurried as rapidly as they could force their way through the water. There could be but one meaning to the action and both boys knew that the natives were again making a try at the boat and that Gordon had had to raise the anchor in order to keep away from them.

By the time they had reached the spot the anchor was out of sight as they could not see all the way to the surface owing to the movement of the waves. Jim, after looking upward for a moment, made a gesture which Slim understood and as the latter nodded his head, they both began to inflate their suits. That Gordon was in any real danger neither of them believed for it was an easy matter to keep out of their way with the engine going. But there was always the possibility that he might not have been able to start the engine or that the natives might in some way reach the boat unobserved.

At any rate they were both anxious to reach the surface as quickly as possible and so they blew up their suits to a greater extent than was usual with the result that they were soon rising rapidly.

CHAPTER XI

CLOSE QUARTERS

Jim's head bobbed up from the water a second ahead of Slim, and his head was followed by a good part of his shoulders owing to the excess of air which filled his suit. Eagerly he looked about for a sight of the boat and his heart breathed a sigh of relief as he saw it about a hundred yards away and realized that it was moving, and was well ahead of not less than a dozen canoes filled with natives. They had not trapped him and he had been able to start the engine, and so far all was well. Slim, who was now close beside him, pointed to the boat and nodded his head in token of relief.

But just at that moment they both saw that the boat was losing speed. Owing to the helmets they were, of course, unable to hear the sound of the engine but both knew instinctively that it had stopped. Had Gordon shut it down for some purpose or had it stopped of its own

accord, and if so, would he be able to get it going again before the canoes reached him? These were questions which flashed through the minds of both the boys as they floated there utterly unable to raise a hand to help him in case he needed it.

Now the boat had all but lost headway and the canoes, the natives shouting at the top of their voices, were plying their paddles with a mad fury and the nearest was only about fifty feet from the boat.

Then Gordon appeared on the deck and they saw him raise his arms and a puff of smoke followed the action. Evidently he had been unable to start the engine and was doing the only thing left for him to do.

Another puff of smoke followed and still another but the canoes did not hesitate and they could not see that any of the shots had taken effect. Evidently the natives were determined this time not to be scared off and Jim knew that Gordon would not shoot to kill except as a last resort.

A moment later and the natives were pouring over the side of the boat and Gordon's figure was lost as they surrounded him. Never had

Jim felt so utterly helpless. What could he do? That he must do something and quickly was plain in his mind, but what? That question racked his brain as he watched the boat. But a single canoe had emptied its hoard onto the boat and it was soon plain that they were going to tow it to the shore. They could see one of the natives as he threw a rope to another of the band standing in the stern of one of the canoes. Then quickly all the rest of the canoes were fastened together with pieces of rope which they had evidently brought with them. Then the line straightened out and the procession started for the shore.

Up to this time the boys had, they believed, been unobserved by any of the natives, but as the line of canoes straightened one of the men in the first canoe got to his feet and pointed in their direction. Almost instantly the canoe turned toward them even as the line which bound it to the craft behind was cast off.

Jim gave a signal to Slim which he understood and a moment later they sank out of sight as the air escaped from their suits. Once more on the bottom Jim did not hesitate but started off in the direction of the island with Slim close

to his heels. Just what he intended to do he could not have told, but his brother was in grave danger and he was going to help him. That much was clear but the details would have to wait. He remembered that a curved point of land reached out for a distance of several hundred feet in the direction just opposite from where the boat had last been anchored, and that the canoes had come from around that point. It was, he believed, necessary for them to round that point under water and get there before the natives arrived with the boat and plane. He did not think they should have much trouble in accomplishing it provided they towed the boat all the way in. In case they should compell Gordon to start the engine—well—that would be something else again. Anyhow, it was not likely that he would do it even if he could and it was evident that he had already tried and failed.

These thoughts and many others busied his mind as he pushed his way through the water as rapidly as possible with nothing except his sense of direction to guide him. Slim was for some time keeping close at his heels, but after awhile, on glancing back, he saw that

he was some little distance in the rear. So he slowed up his pace a bit and allowed him to catch up. As he reached his side Slim signaled him that he was going as fast as he could, and Jim nodded his head in token that he understood and that it was fast enough.

After what seemed an almost interminable length of time to Slim, who was about all in from trying his best to delay Jim no more than was absolutely necessary, he turned sharply to the left and a few minutes later his head appeared above the surface. Eagerly he looked about and a thrill of satisfaction shot through him as he saw that they were behind the point of land and that there was no sign of the boats to be seen. They were but a few yards from the shore and soon they were stripping off the diving suits in a dense clump of trees.

"Whose move is it now?" Slim demanded as

"About how many of those black fellows were there out there?" Jim asked without answering Slim's question.

"About a hundred I'd say."

"My guess too. Anyhow there are more than two of us can lick in a rough and tumble."

"Oh, I don't know. The way I feel right now

I believe I could handle seventy-five of 'em. No, but all jokes aside, what are we going to do?"

"Haven't the faintest idea in the world."

"You haven't?"

"You heard me the first time."

"Then why did we come in here? Tell me that."

"Well, we couldn't do anything out there, and we've got to do something, haven't we?"

"Of course. Why, those guys might get rough with Gordon."

"If they harm him I'll—"

"And I'll help you," Slim interrupted.

"I know that, but we've got to make up our minds what to do and we can't be very long about it either. They're apt to come around that point any minute."

"And you haven't an idea. Well, then, I reckon it's up to me to take the lead. Now in the first place we're going to sneak up over that strip and see where they are and how long it's going to take them to get in. Never decide until you have enough data to work on. You know that's what Professor Stick-in-the-mud used to tell us and he sure knew his equations."

They were half way up the narrow ridge by

the time Slim paused in his talking and a moment later, stretched at full length on the ground, they raised their heads and looked out over the sea.

"It'll be all of a half hour," Slim said as they saw the boats still some distance from the point. "They're making pretty slow time."

"But you'd better hurry up and get that mind of yours working. We've got to have some sort of a plan to go on and I can't think of a thing except to attack them as they come in."

"And commit suicide. No thank you—not yet."

"They'll probably take him to their village the way they did you."

"Most likely."

"But they'll keep a better watch on him."

"I'll bet."

"Snap out of it, will you?"

"I'm snapping, but I haven't quite snapped yet. Let a fellow have a minute to think, will you?"

"Sure, only—"

"Shut up."

"My mistake."

For some minutes they watched the fleet of canoes as they dragged the boat and plane slowly through the water. About a mile an hour Jim judged their speed. To him the task seemed all but hopeless, although he knew full well that they would never give up trying so long as a breath of life remained in their bodies. But the odds against them were so large.

Suddenly Slim, as though struck by an idea, grabbed Jim by the arm.

"I've got it I think."

"Got what?"

"The plan. Come with me and don't wait to ask questions."

He hurried down the low slope and ran across the strip of sand and plunged into the woods with Jim close on his heels. Neither spoke as they hurried through the forest until they had reached the further edge beyond which was the little village of huts. Then Gordon stopped and from behind a thick growth of bushes he peeped out.

"Doesn't seem to be any one around," he whispered.

"Must be some women," Jim told him.

"Then they're inside the houses."

"Hadn't you better tell me what we're going to do?"

"Sure. We're going to set fire to the village."

"What!"

"You heard me."

"But what good will that do?"

"You're stupid. Don't you get it?"

"Can't say I do."

"What will those men back there do when they see the smoke? I reckon those huts will make plenty of smoke."

"I suppose—jumping fish, but I believe you've got a head after all."

"Thanks. I thought it would penetrate in time. They'll rush through the woods and forget all about Gordon."

"I'll bet they will."

"Fortunately I've got a box of matches and there's plenty of dry grass and the wind's in just the right direction and what's more there's plenty of it."

"Grass or wind?"

"Both. Now if we can only sneak up behind

that nearest hut and get it going in good shape without being seen we'll do the trick. Keep low and pull grass as you go along."

There was a thick growth of tall dry grass between them and the hut and they crept on their hands and knees. Not a sound broke the stillness as they approached the hut with all the grass they could carry in their arms. Evidently all the members of the tribe who had not gone in the canoes were taking a siesta. The hut was built largely of the long coarse grass which grew so rank all about and they knew that once started a fire would probably wipe out the entire village.

Quickly and silently they piled the grass which they had pulled against the side of the hut and when all was ready Slim struck a match and lit it. For an instant the blaze seemed to hesitate, but soon it caught and, fanned by the wind, it grew rapidly.

"Come on, let's beat it back," Slim whispered.

"But we must wake them up," Jim said. "We don't want them to burn to death."

They waited until they were about half way

back to the edge of the woods and then both together shouted as loudly as they were able and were gratified to hear almost immediately cries of fright and as they glanced back just before plunging into the woods they saw a number of women running about the space between the huts. The hut they had fired was burning fiercely and the flames, fanned by the high wind, had already caught the one next to it while a dense cloud of smoke was bellowing upward.

"Guess that'll hold 'em for awhile," Slim chuckled as he led the way into the woods.

Jim caught him by the arm. "Wait a minute. I've got an idea."

"Spring it," Slim ordered as he stopped in his tracks.

"Well, now listen. There must be a path through these woods which they use and it seems to me the thing for us to do is to find that path as soon as we can. They'll undoubtedly use it when they see the smoke and we ought to be hiding so that we can see them as they pass. Then if Gordon is with them we may be able to do something to get him away."

"May your Aunt Isaac, we'll get him all right."

"Then we must hurry."

"You bet. They're apt to be along most any time now. This wind must have helped them a lot in getting in to the shore."

"If we only knew which way that path is."

"Well, it's not very far away, that's sure, and my idea is that we'd better separate and one go one way and one the other. Can you make a noise like any kind of a bird that lives around here?"

"How about a tree owl?"

"I'm not sure whether they are native here or not but we'll take a chance on it. I know a bird that does live in these islands and it makes a noise like this. Get it?"

"Yep, but I couldn't imitate it without a lot of practice."

"You don't have to. You stick to your owl if you find the path and I'll do the same by my bird."

"Good. Here goes."

They parted without more words, Jim turning to the right toward the cliffs while Slim went the other way. Jim had an idea that the path would be found the other way and had

purposely sent Slim in that direction fearing that the call of the night owl might arouse suspicion if heard by a native. He was right for he had not gone over a hundred feet when he heard the clear call of the bird which Slim had declared lived on the island. Quickly turning he hurried back and in a few minutes reached Slim who was standing beside a well beaten path about ten feet wide.

"I thought you'd find it," he told him.

"Heard me all right, did you?"

"Sure did, and it was a pippin of an imitation if you don't mind me saying so."

"Go the limit."

"I didn't know you went in for that kind of stuff but you sure have got that bird down fine. But we'd better lose no time in finding a good hiding place."

"Had we better wait at this end of the trail or get nearer the other end?"

"As near here as we can find a place to hide, I'd say. I figure it this way. They'll see the smoke and come a running and have a couple of them to bring Gordon along. Well, he'll be in no great hurry and the chances are that by the time they get here he and his guards will

be some distance in the rear. How does it hit you?"

"Right between the eyes."

"Then let's find a place to hide."

They soon located a good place behind a clump of bushes which bordered the trail and both felt certain that hidden there they would escape the notice of men hurrying along the path. At the same time the clump was not so thick but that they could see through it with sufficient distinctness to recognize Gordon.

"Now all we can do is wait," Slim declared as he stretched himself on the ground.

"That's all, I reckon," Jim agreed.

"Hope it won't be long. I hate to wait."

"So do I, but I don't think we'll have to do it very long. They'll likely see the smoke before they get ashore and the chances are they'll leave the boat with—"

"You mean they won't bring Gordon with them."

"I don't know, of course, but I've an idea he won't be with the first batch we see running along this trail. But I think he'll be along sooner or later."

"Suppose they'll suspect us of the trick of setting the fire?"

"They'll be pretty dumb if they don't, but we should worry about that."

"I'll tell the world. Listen."

A faint shout coming from the direction of the sea had caught Slim's keen ear.

"I didn't hear anything."

"I did. There, don't you hear that?" as another yell made itself heard above the sound of the wind.

"I heard it that time. They've seen the smoke, that's certain."

"And they'll be along pretty soon."

"I reckon."

They heard no more shouts except from the other direction but in about ten minutes they heard the patter of feet and a moment later a dozen or more natives raced past running at top speed toward the village.

"He wasn't with that bunch," Jim whispered after they had passed.

"He wouldn't be," Slim replied.

"There'll be some more of them along soon."

"I can hear some more coming right now and, believe me, they're burning up the trail."

A moment later and a larger crowd passed followed almost immediately by more until the boys felt sure that not less than seventy-five or eighty men had returned to the village. But they saw nothing of Gordon and felt more confident than ever that he would come later with two or three men to guard him.

"Keep your ears open," Jim said after the last of the natives had disappeared.

"I'm doing that little thing."

But ten and then fifteen minutes passed and no one else appeared.

"Think we'd better hit the trail back?" Slim asked.

"Let's wait another five minutes," Jim suggested.

The five minutes were just up and they were about to start when Slim declared that someone was coming.

"And they're only a short distance down the trail," he added.

"I hear them," Jim whispered.

A moment later and peeping through the bush he saw his brother coming along with a powerful looking native on either side of him, each

holding an arm. Gordon was hanging back and the men were almost dragging him along. The boys waited until they had passed their place of concealment and then stole softly out into the trail about twenty feet behind them.

CHAPTER XII

"TACKLE LOW"

So silently did the two boys move that they were within a few feet of the natives before they were aware of their presence. Then Jim had the misfortune to step on a dead stick and it snapped with a loud sound. Instantly the two men turned. But they were too late, for the boys, with the skill acquired through long hours of practice on the football field, made a flying tackle. Jim struck his man just below the knees and he came to the ground with a thump which knocked the wind from his body and before he could recover Jim had leaped to his feet and, as the man struggled to his knees, struck him with all his strength on the point of the jaw and he sank slowly back to the earth.

Slim also made a beautiful tackle and brought his man down with little trouble, but he did not fall so heavily and with a fierce kick managed to break Slim's hold and sprang to his feet.

What might have happened will never be known for the man was a powerful fellow, but Gordon, quick to take in the situation, swung his fist into his face before he had time to make a move and the blow, although not heavy enough to knock him out, staggered him and before he could recover Slim had again rushed in and followed Gordon's blow with one of his own. The two blows coming so close together were too much for the native and he turned and ran.

"Come on, now, let's make it snappy," Jim urged as the man he had hit stirred.

They started off down the trail as fast as they could run and not a word was said until they reached the edge of the woods.

"I guess we're safe enough now for a few minutes at least," Jim panted as he came to a halt.

"There's the *Betty Ann* and the plane," Slim cried, pointing toward the sea where the two boats could be seen about an eighth of a mile from where they stood.

"The boat's aground," Gordon told them.

"And we'd better get the diving suits and get to them as soon as we can," Jim suggested.

The place where they had left the suits was

but a short distance away and they found them untouched and a few minutes lates they were wading out to the boat.

"It's a lucky thing she struck head on," Jim declared as he climbed aboard.

"Think we can back her off?" Gordon asked following him over the rail.

"I'll see if I can start the engine," Jim said making his way to the engine-room. "What was the matter with it?"

"I didn't have time to find out. All at once the engine stopped and I couldn't start it. Couldn't get a kick out of it."

"Then perhaps we'd all better get out and see if we can push her off before we bother with the engine," suggested Slim who had followed them into the engine-room.

"I know a better trick than that," Jim told him. "We'll see if we can't pull her off with the plane."

The plane was floating clear as the rope by which it was tied to the stern of the boat was not long enough to permit it to float into too shallow water, and it took Jim but a moment to climb in and start the motor after he had

turned it around and Gordon had made fast the rope.

"Give her the goods now," he shouted, and Jim slowly increased the speed of the propeller until the plane had moved out far enough to make the rope taut. Then he pushed the lever over several notches and the plane strained and pulled but the boat was stuck too fast.

"I don't dare put on any more power," he called as he shut off the motor. "I'm afraid something'll give way."

"We'll get out and push," Gordon told him. "Come on, old man, we're all wet anyhow."

He jumped into the water which was about up to his neck and Slim followed. Then, wading to the bow they pushed with all their strength as Jim again started the motor. At first there was no visible result but after a moment had passed and Slim was puffing like a steam engine, the boat moved and soon slid off and was free.

"That turned the trick," Jim shouted as he again shut off the power.

"When I set that shoulder of mine to a thing that thing has got to move," Slim boasted as he and Gordon climbed back over the rail.

"I'll remember that statement," Jim said, "and the next time we go down to the wreck you can try your shoulder on it."

"But my shoulder doesn't work so well under water," Slim laughed.

"Now we're ready for your story," Jim said a moment later as he climbed from the plane to the boat.

The boat was several rods from the shore and Gordon had thrown out the anchor.

"Well, as I told you, the engine stopped very soon after it started and I couldn't get it going again. So I came back on deck and they were pretty close. I fired a few times but somehow or other they didn't seem to scare worth a cent. I suppose I ought to have hit a couple of them but I just couldn't seem to bring myself to do it. Well, to make a long story short they got on board and nabbed me and that's about all. Of course I put up a fight but it didn't amount to much. Then they towed the boat in and when they had almost reached the shore they saw the smoke over the woods and all but two of them started for home pronto. Those two stayed behind to look after me. Now tell your story."

"As a story teller you'd make a good butcher," Jim told him. "That was about the worst description of a scrap I ever listened to. Now get this as a piece of descriptive narrative," and he proceeded to give him a full account of what he and Slim had done from the time they saw the anchor moving.

"I pass," Gordon gasped when he had finished. "You're the mosquito's ear-muffs when it comes to making a thing sound big. But I was glad to see you just the same. I wasn't at all certain that it wasn't going to be curtains for little me."

"It was Slim's plan," Jim told him.

"Well, haven't I always said that he had brains?"

"Maybe, but I don't remember it."

"Now that compliments and recriminations are over suppose we see about the engine," Slim suggested.

"Recrima who?" Gordon demanded. "Use English when you talk to us, will you?"

A moment later in the engine-room Slim pressed the starter after priming the motor but, although the starter worked all right, the engine did not start.

"Doesn't seem to me that she's getting any gas," he declared after trying several times.

"I know she isn't," Gordon offered. "Wait a minute till I take a look at that carbureter. I told you so," he announced a moment later, "dry as a bone."

"Then the feed line must be stopped up," Slim told them. "Give me that wrench and we'll soon see."

He was right, for on disconnecting the pipe line they found that a bit of waste had somehow gotten into it, completely shutting off the flow of gas.

"No wonder you couldn't start it," Jim said as he picked the waste out with a piece of wire. "It beats me though how such a thing got in there. Somebody must have been mighty careless, if you inquire from me."

"I'm not asking you," Gordon assured him. "It was there and we'll let it go at that."

As soon as the line was connected up again Slim pressed the starter and the engine sprang to life and purred as contentedly as ever.

"And to think that a bit of waste like that might have cost Gordon his life," Slim suggested.

"Sometimes in life it's the little things that count the most," Jim reminded him and added: "Sometimes for good and sometimes for evil."

"It came mighty near being evil this time all right," Gordon grinned.

"Now I've got another idea," Slim declared as he shut off the engine.

"Your ideas go in this company," Gordon assured him.

"We're all ears," Jim added.

"How many canoes are there pulled up on the shore?" Slim asked.

"About eight I reckon," Jim told him.

"That's right," Slim said after a short glance. "Now my idea is that if they don't have the use of them we'll have a whole lot less trouble in the future."

"You mean we'd better smash them?" Gordon asked.

"Either that or tow them out with us. I kind of hate to ruin them."

"I don't," Gordon declared with a shake of his head. "They'd have ruined me all right if you hadn't saved me."

"But we must remember that we do not understand why they are so hostile toward us,"

Jim reminded him. "Remember they're little better than savages and they may have what seems to them a good reason. I feel the same way that Slim does. I don't want to harm them any more than is necessary. Of course when it comes to our safety we've got to take what steps we can to protect ourselves."

"'Nuf said," Gordon agreed. "Let's get busy and hitch them all together and take them with us and then when we're through we'll return them with our best compliments."

There was plenty of small rope on the boat and they were soon ashore pushing the canoes into the water and fastening them together They had all the time been watching the smoke which floated over the woods and had been pleased to note that it had soon decreased in volume and had finally died out, indicating that the natives had been able to save at least a part of the village. Seven of the eight canoes were in the water and tied together when Slim happened to glance toward the woods and gave a quick cry of alarm.

"Here they come."

Jim was up to his knees in the water about twenty feet from the shore while Slim and

Gordon were both on land just starting to push in the last canoe. Both boys looked up quickly and saw a dozen or more of the natives just emerging from the woods and they were coming on the run. Gordon did not hesitate a minute but quickly gave the canoe a twist which turned it bottom side up and then leaped on it, jumping as high as possible in the air and coming down with sufficient force to drive both feet through the light craft.

"Good boy," Jim called. "Now come on."

Slim and Gordon rushed into the water and the three of them started pushing the fleet toward the boat. They reached it just as the first of the natives reached the edge of the water and Jim pulled himself over the side and hurried to the engine-room while Gordon and Slim were a bit slower in getting aboard. The natives, without hesitating, rushed into the water and for a moment it seemed that they would reach the boat before Jim could get it under way. But the engine started just as Gordon pulled the anchor off the bottom and the nearest of the natives missed the tail of the plane by not more than six inches as the boat gathered speed and

in another minute they were safe for the present at least.

"Another second and that fellow would have had us," Gordon gasped as he finished making fast the rope which held the fleet.

"I'd cut it a bit finer than that," Slim assured him from the pilot-house as he gave the wheel a slight turn. "But I'm sorry we didn't have time to get that last canoe in. Suppose they can fix it?"

"Probably, but it'll take them some time and not very many can come out in it at a time."

"But it wouldn't need many of them to come out and get the rest of the canoes," Jim said as he joined them in time to hear the last statement.

"Say, boy, what do you think we'd be doing all the time they were getting them?" Gordon demanded.

"Well, if we knew they were getting them I reckon we might be able to do a whole lot about it, but suppose it happens to be a very dark night, and by the way it looks now it's likely to be, and suppose they got out here and did the trick before we knew it."

"Then I'd say that we just got what we de-

served," Gordon told him. "If we can't guard those canoes with everything in our favor then we ought to lose them and I don't mean maybe."

"I know you don't," Jim laughed. "And I believe we can, but we've got to be on the *qui vive* all the time."

"On the which?" Slim demanded.

"I mean on the alert," Jim explained.

"Then why don't you say what you mean? I hate a man to say one thing and mean another."

"I see you don't know your Latin," Jim laughed.

"No, and what's more, I don't want to know a thing about any of those dead languages. It's more than I can do to keep up in what live ones I have to in college."

"If you knew something about Latin you'd find your French and Spanish easier," Jim assured him.

"Maybe I would but I'll take a chance without it," Slim growled.

Before they had finished dinner all three agreed that there would be no more diving that day. Slim declared that they had had enough excitement for one day and Jim and Gordon

agreed with him. So, as soon as the dinner was cleared away and the dishes washed Jim suggested that they take a short flight in the plane and the others readily agreed.

"I'd like to fly over and see how much damage we did to the village," he told them.

"I've a certain amount of curiosity in that direction myself," Slim added.

"But we mustn't get too far away," Jim cautioned.

"I guess there's not much danger of that," Gordon told him. "They haven't done a thing toward fixing their last canoe and it would take a man at least half an hour to swim out here, so if we're back in that time we should worry."

"But you forget that they may have some more canoes somewhere," Slim reminded him.

"Gee, that's so," Gordon declared, "I never thought of that."

"Well, we won't be gone but a few minutes," Jim told them. "We can fly over the village and and then come back and fly around in sight of the fleet as long as we're a mind to."

It took but a few minutes for them to get aboard the plane and soon they were in the air heading straight for the village of huts on the

other side of the woods. The sky was heavy with clouds and there was every indication that it would rain before nightfall. But the air was fairly clear and they were able to see the entire village before they were half way over the woods.

"They must have a mighty good fire department," Gordon declared as soon as he caught the first glimpse. "I don't believe more than four or five of those huts were even damaged."

"Well, I'm glad of it so long as we accomplished our purpose," Jim told him.

They were flying at an altitude of a little more than a thousand feet and Jim maintained the height as they passed over the village. Evidently the members of the tribe were much excited as men were running around between the huts, and as one caught sight of the plane and began shouting, others poured out from the huts and began dancing about and shaking their fists toward the plane.

"Some excitement down there," Gordon chuckled.

"I'll tell the world, and perhaps I'm not glad to be safe up here," Slim added.

Jim had already swung around in a sharp

curve and was heading back. He was uneasy regarding the boat and the fleet of canoes. He knew that some of those natives were far from being dumb and he had an idea that they had been watched all the time.

"Get the glass and take a look," he ordered as they reached the edge of the woods. "We'll be in sight of the water in a minute or two."

"I guess it's all right," Gordon said a moment later as the sea came in view. "I don't—yes I do too. Looks like a couple of woolly heads out there about three quarters of the way to the boat. Better hit her up a bit."

"Right," Jim agreed giving the switch a couple more notches.

"That's what it is all right," Gordon soon announced. "And, oh boy, how those babies can swim."

The heads of the two swimmers were visible now to both Jim and Slim without the aid of the glass and Jim, giving the stick a slight shove, headed the plane straight for the boat on a long slant.

"We got plenty of time," Gordon told him.

"I know it, but I'm not taking any chances,"

Jim replied. "Those fellows are going through the water pretty fast."

It is doubtful if the swimmers knew of the proximity of the plane until it struck the water between them and the boat. They were swimming side by side and were only a few yards from the plane when it came down. A yell of disappointment followed the slight splash as the plane hit the water and both heads disappeared as Jim shut off the power. But they reappeared a moment later several yards further off and immediately moved toward the shore.

"Guess they got cold feet," Slim chuckled.

"Not in this water they didn't," Gordon nodded.

"Well, we didn't get back much too soon," Jim declared as he made the plane fast to the boat.

"I guess that question about them having another canoe is settled," Gordon declared. "They never would have risked the sharks if they had had one."

"They think about as much of a shark as you would of a sardine," Slim told him, "but they probably would have used a canoe if they had

one. No, I reckon we've got their whole fleet sewed up all except the one you put your feet through."

"You mean a shark won't attack them?" Jim asked as he jumped from the plane to the boat.

"Oh, I guess a man-eater would go for one all right, but they always carry a knife with them and the shark usually gets the worst of it."

"I believe I'd root for the shark," Gordon declared.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE NIGHT

It began to rain before they had finished supper. Not a hard storm but a gentle drizzle which bade fair to continue for a long time. And they all knew that they were in for a very dark night with a thick fog. And that meant that it would be doubly hard to keep an efficient watch.

"It's too bad the *Betty Ann* hasn't a good search light," Slim remarked as he was drying the dishes.

"Wouldn't be much good in a fog like this," Gordon told him.

"I suppose not, but it's going to be a pretty hard job to see those guys if any of them make us a visit to-night."

"I doubt if they'll try it," Gordon said dumping the water from the dish pan as a signal that he had washed the last dish for the night.

"Don't fool yourself," Jim cautioned him. "This kind of a night will just be pea soup for

them and they'll take advantage of it or I miss my guess."

"I think Jim's right," Slim added.

"Now I'll tell you what I think we'd better do," Jim continued. "Of course we can all sit up all night if you think it's best, but it's only six o'clock now and I don't believe they'll make the attempt till they think we're asleep, say about ten o'clock or later. Now two of us had better get some sleep until then and then whoever has been watching can hit the hay while the other two watch. How about it?"

"Suits me," Gordon agreed.

"Me too," Slim added.

"All right then. Suppose you, Gordon, take the first watch and Slim and I'll turn in."

"Anything to be obliging."

"Good. Now you want to put out all the lights except a little one in the cabin and stay outside so that you can hear any sound. You've got to depend more on your ears than your eyes."

"Just as you say," Gordon told him as he pulled an oil-skin coat from one of the lockers. "If they get here without me knowing it you have my permission to keelhaul me."

"Provided we can find you," Jim reminded him.

"If they get me again you needn't take the trouble to hunt for me," Gordon told him.

Outside it was rapidly growing dark and he could not see more than a few feet through the fog which even then was very thick. It was raining a fine mist which seemed to blend with the fog and Gordon shook his head as he paced slowly back and forth on the tiny deck.

"If they keep quiet enough they can get mighty close without being seen, that's certain," he mumbled to himself. "And I'll bet that it'll be a week at least before ten o'clock comes."

An hour passed and it was so dark that he could not see the water as he leaned over the rail. There was no wind and the fine mist made no sound and the stillness was oppressive to his nerves already wrought up to a high pitch by the exciting events of the day.

Another hour passed and the silence was becoming almost unbearable. He was also getting very sleepy but he knew that so long as he kept on his feet there was no danger of going to sleep. He was also very tired and it

seemed as though every bone in his body had a separate ache. He knew it was due largely to the reaction and that a few hours of sound sleep would set him right, but it would be another two hours before he could get it. Could he ever stand it?

He was in the bow trying to pierce the darkness with his eyes when a slight splash caught his ear and instantly he was on the alert. For a moment he did not move but strained his ears to catch a repetition of the sound. He thought it had come from behind him and a few feet out to his right but he was not sure and so hesitated to move until he had heard it again. But it was not repeated and he made his way slowly along the side of the boat, every sense alert to catch the slightest indication that an enemy was near. But he reached the stern without hearing or seeing a thing and was forced to conclude that either it was a fish or that his imagination had played him false.

The fleet of canoes were fastened to the left side of the boat and he paced slowly back and forth along that side, sure that even a native would be unable to get away with them without his knowledge. Slowly the minutes dragged by

and he heard nothing more. Finally, when it seemed that he could stand it no longer, a glance at his watch told him that it was time to call the others and he lost no time in doing it.

"Gee, but it must have been some time last summer when you went to bed," he declared as Jim and Slim jumped from their bunks and joined him in the cabin.

"Did it seem long?" Jim asked.

"Absolutely endless."

"It was too bad, but now you can have a good nap and you'll feel better. Did you hear anything?"

"Not a thing except a slight splash about two hours ago. I thought it might be one of them but evidently it wasn't because I didn't hear it again and the canoes are still there. Call me if there's anything doing."

"Sure," Jim promised as he followed Slim through the doorway.

Gordon was asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow and Jim and Slim took up the watch on the outside. The mist still fell and the fog seemed as thick as ever. But now there were two to keep each other company and time al-

ways seems to pass faster under those conditions.

"Poor Gordon, I guess he found it pretty lonesome," Jim declared as they leaned for a moment on the rail on the port side. "But I thought it was the best plan for him to get his part over with early in the evening. I knew he would insist on taking his turn and I'm glad he has had it and can sleep the rest of the night. He needs it."

"And no wonder after what he went through. He's a game kid all right," Slim declared. "Do you think they'll make an attempt to-night?"

"I do. They're not going to give up all those canoes if they can help it and they probably figure that unless they get them to-night we may sail away and they'd never see them again."

"Probably you're right but, Oh boy, aren't they going to have a sweet time doing it?"

"I guess we can prevent it if we see or rather hear them in time. But what worries me is how we're going to do it. You can't see only about an inch in front of your nose and those fellows can move around mighty quiet if you ask me."

"Don't I know it? But don't tell me that they can get away with those canoes right under our noses and we not hear them. Be yourself, boy."

"I hope you're right and you probably are, but, as the old darkie said, I has misgibbins, I has."

"If you feel that way about it why not pull up the anchor and move out a few miles?"

"That's just what I was thinking. It can't do a bit of harm and it might do a lot of good. Let's get the anchor up but be careful and don't make a noise and wake up Gordon."

They were about to act on the new plan when Slim's quick ears caught a sound which caused him to grab hold of Jim's arm.

"S-s-s-s-s-h," he whispered with his lips close to Jim's ear. "There's someone up near the bow."

At the moment they were standing near the stern and Jim had not caught the sound as he had been leaning over the rail at the moment.

"I didn't hear anything," he whispered back.

"I did. There's at least one man on the boat besides us," Slim insisted.

"Come on and we'll see," Jim whispered taking hold of Slim's arm.

"Make it easy," Slim cautioned.

Both boys had on rubber soled shoes and they moved forward without making a sound. They had advanced but a few feet when the creak of a board was plainly audible to them both and Jim gave Slim's arm a twitch. A second later another creak told them that whoever was there was coming toward them and Jim moved faster to meet him. He was sure that they had made no sound and he could not see a foot in front but a moment later some sixth sense told him that it was time to act and he threw himself forward at the same time starting his fist from a position well back of his side. And the fist struck something much more substantial than thin air. But it was a glancing blow and evidently did little damage for before Jim could repeat it he was grasped about the waist by a pair of powerful arms.

But he did not wait for the grasp to tighten. A quick twist of the body and he was free, and once more his right fist leaped forward with all his strength behind it. This time the blow was more effective as it landed squarely on the tip of the chin and the owner of that chin, evidently a tall man, toppled over backward and passed

out of the picture over the rail. The entire action had lasted but a few seconds and following the splash the boys listened for a sound that would tell them that another native was on board. But all they heard was a slight swish of water which told them that the man Jim had knocked overboard was swimming away.

"Glad he isn't going—" Jim began in a whisper, but he never finished the sentence for just then there came from the water a wild shriek of agony followed by an audible swirl of water. Then all was quiet again.

"Guess he wasn't quick enough with his knife that time," Jim whispered.

"Probably he had no warning," Slim declared.

"And to think that he got on board without being heard. Can you beat it?"

"Listen."

"There's another one of them in one of the canoes."

"You said it. Got your flash?"

"You bet."

They hurried around to the other side of the boat and Jim, holding his arm out over the side as far as he could reach, threw on the light.

Against the fog it was little better than nothing but it did enable them to see dimly two forms, one of them in the canoe which was tied to the boat and the other in the one next to it. The one in the nearest canoe was trying to untie the rope and Jim wondered why he did not cut it."

Slim, standing close by his side, had his automatic in his hand and a loud crack as he pressed the trigger was followed by two splashes.

"Maybe that'll hold 'em awhile," Slim chuckled.

"You didn't hit him, did you?" Jim asked.

"No, but I reckon the bullet went through the bottom of the canoe not more than an inch from his pretty pink toes."

"Where do you get that pink stuff?" Jim laughed, just as Gordon joined them.

"What's up?" he demanded. "I heard a shot."

"Sorry we had to disturb you," Jim told him, "but we had a few visitors and had to entertain them. But they've gone now and you'd better get back to bed."

"Didn't I hear someone yell or did I dream it?"

"I guess you heard it all right," Slim told

him. "One of them managed to get on the boat without being heard and Jim just naturally knocked him overboard."

"A man doesn't usually yell like that when Jim hits him," Gordon objected.

"No, and this one didn't either. We think a shark got him. That was our diagnosis of the case."

"What were you firing at?"

"A couple more of them managed to get into the canoes and we didn't like it," Slim told him.

"I see. They beat it, didn't they?"

"They disappeared," Jim told him. "Hope that man-eater doesn't get them."

"All right, but don't hope too hard," Gordon grinned. "I somehow can't seem to work up a whole lot of enthusiasm over their safety. I don't like 'em."

"Nor I for that matter," Jim agreed. "But I don't believe we'll see anything more of them to-night and you'd better get back to your downy. We'll try not to disturb you again."

"You both going to stay up?"

"I think we'd better for awhile at least."

"All right, but you call me as soon as it gets

light and you can take another little snooze. Nighty night."

"I guess that shark got his tummy full with that guy he nabbed and didn't tackle those other two," Slim suggested as soon as he and Jim were alone again.

"He was big enough to make a meal for a mighty hungry fish, I'd say," Jim declared. "But we were lucky to get out of it so well."

"I don't see much luck about it," Slim objected. "There was something besides luck back of that blow you hit that fellow and I've got pretty good ears. I guess we had something to do with it. Sure they won't come back tonight?"

"I don't believe they will but, of course, we can't be sure, so we'll keep a pretty close watch till it gets light. How still it is."

"No wonder it seemed so long to Gordon. If I had to stay out here all alone I'd go bug house for fair."

Even though they spent most of the time talking together the hours passed slowly and they were happy when the first faint glow in the east told them that day was about to break. They had neither seen nor heard anything suspicious since their visitors left and for the last

hour they had somewhat relaxed their vigilance.

"Shall we call Gordon?" Slim asked.

"He'll be mad if we don't," Jim chuckled. "Let's see, he's had about six hours' sleep and we both need a nap. Yes, we'd better call him."

But Gordon came from the cabin just then and said that he had just woke up and was as fresh as a daisy.

"I suppose you were going to let me sleep all day," he finished.

"No, we were just going to call you."

"Maybe. Well, anyhow, you turn in now and I'll call you when breakfast is ready."

"Make it by seven o'clock," Jim told him. "We want to get in a good day on the wreck and get away from here as soon as possible."

"You said something," Slim declared as he followed Jim into the cabin.

CHAPTER XIV

MAN-EATERS

Gordon had a good breakfast ready promptly on the hour and called Jim and Slim. The weather had cleared somewhat although it looked as though it might rain again before long. He had seen nothing of the natives either on the water or the shore and they all agreed, as they gathered for the meal, that it was not likely that they would make another attack very soon.

"But that doesn't mean that we can let up in our watching for a single minute," Jim cautioned.

"Meaning that those guys may not know the rules of the game, eh," Gordon grinned.

"Exactly," Jim told him. "By all the rules they're licked, but sometimes you run across a fellow who doesn't know when he is licked and then you've got to look out."

"I've seen him," Gordon smiled.

"Seen whom?" Jim demanded.

"The fellow you were talking about, that guy that doesn't know when he's licked. He isn't a thousand miles away from here, and he isn't on shore either."

"Wonder who he can mean?" Slim chuckled with a sly glance at Jim.

"Oh, he's just talking to hear himself, that's all. It's a way he has and it doesn't mean a thing."

"No?" Gordon inquired.

"Not a thing," Jim repeated.

"How about drawing lots to see who'll stay up this time?" Jim suggested as they were cleaning up after the meal.

"Suits me," Gordon agreed, and Slim nodded his assent.

Jim drew three pennies from his pocket and placed them on the little table. "I don't know the dates and the one that picks up the oldest one stays up," he announced.

"1886," Slim read as he picked up the first penny. "I guess I'm elected all right."

His guess proved to be correct and the others began to get themselves ready for the down trip, as Gordon called it.

Just as they were about to put on the helmets Slim joined them on the deck and in his hand he carried two long knives each in a sheath which could be fastened to a ring so located that it would be handy to the right hand.

"I want you to take these along," he told them. "They're better than the ones you have, and if that shark is still lurking around you may need them."

"I don't believe he'd tackle a man in one of these suits," Jim said.

"But he may not know the rules," Gordon warned.

"Oh, we'll take them of course. Safety first and all that sort of thing," Jim smiled as he snapped the sheath to the ring on his suit.

"And don't forget that when a shark attacks he has to turn pretty well over on his back in order to make a bite and that's the time to stick him. But you've got to be quick."

"Reckon we won't linger around very long while he's turning," Gordon grinned.

"And mind, you keep an eye toward the shore," Jim cautioned just before he adjusted his helmet.

"I'll be on the watch," Slim promised.

The sun was shining brightly as they slipped over the side of the boat and there was now every prospect that it would be a fair day. Jim had made up his mind that he was going to get inside the wreck that day if it were a possibility. He realized that they had had two narrow escapes from the hands of the natives and he feared they might not be so fortunate a third time. He had little fear of sharks as he did not believe one would attack a man in a diving suit and so far he had not seen any of any great size and he doubted if they were very plentiful. Nevertheless he kept a sharp lookout as he dropped down through the green water. Gordon was just a few feet below him and a bit to his right.

Jim was within a few feet of the bottom and Gordon had already landed when the attack came. The first thing he knew of the nearness of the man-eater was when a huge object, doubtlessly somewhat magnified by the water, dashed toward him in a great swirl of water. Instantly his right hand grasped the handle of the knife and jerked it from the sheath. And he was none too soon for there was a sudden flash of white as the huge fish turned on its side and showed

a double row of teeth that would have been the despair of a dentist.

Jim felt the impact of the nose as it brushed his side just as his right hand darted out and up. It was fortunate that the blade was long and the point very sharp for the hide was tough and the thrust hardly more than pricked it. But the fish must have felt it for it darted off and for an instant Jim thought that it had fled. But he was wrong. Just as his feet touched the bottom the monster was after him again. But now he was in a better position to meet the attack, and as the huge fish turned its body to bring its mouth in position to bite, he lurched forward, and with all his strength, drove the sharp point into the tough skin. It went home to the hilt and a sharp jerk of the arm greatly enlarged the cut letting out a sudden rush of blood which rapidly dyed the water. A convulsive swish of the tail and the shark disappeared, leaving behind a bloody streak in the water.

Then Jim turned and his own blood nearly froze in his veins as he saw Gordon struggling with a second shark which seemed even larger than the one he had just disposed of. He was about a dozen feet away and it looked to Jim

as though the shark had its powerful jaws closed over Gordon's left thigh. Jim seemed in a night-mare as he hurried to his brother's aid. Never had it seemed so hard to make progress. His feet seemed so heavy that he could barely lift them and the water seemed to be forcing him back. He could see that Gordon had his knife in his right hand and was trying to reach the shark's body with it but could not seem to do it.

Although it seemed hours it was in reality but a few seconds before he had reached Gordon's side and once more his blade cut into the tough skin, making a deep wound. The fish instantly let go its hold and turned slowly on its back, the blood spurting from the deep cut, and Jim realized that he had struck a vital spot. As soon as he saw that the shark was dead he turned to Gordon to find him clinging with both hands to the side of his suit. Quickly realizing that the shark had ripped a tear in the suit and that Gordon was trying to prevent the water from entering, he lost no time in opening the valve and breathed a lot easier as he saw him start to rise toward the surface. He followed as soon as he could inflate his own suit and a

moment later he reached the surface to see Gordon being helped over the side of the boat by Slim. He was fearful lest the shark had inflicted a bad wound and covered the few feet to the boat in record time. As he climbed unaided over the side, he was greatly relieved to see that Gordon already had his helmet off and was grinning. That grin assured Jim that his brother was uninjured and he breathed a silent prayer of thanks as he unscrewed his own helmet.

"Well, old man, you saved my life once more," Gordon greeted him.

"Didn't he bite you?"

"Not a bite. You see I yanked away just in time and all the damage was to my suit. But I couldn't reach the brute with my knife and I could feel that he was getting ready for a fresh bite just as you stuck your knife into him."

"There he is now," Slim shouted pointing to a large body floating a few feet from the boat.

"Wonder where the other one is?" Jim said.

"The other one? You don't mean there were two of 'em."

"I'll say there was," Gordon told him.

"And Jim killed them both?"

"Well, if the other one isn't dead he's got a mighty sore side," Jim assured him.

"It must have been a real fight," Slim sighed. "Of course I had to miss it. Some fellows have all the luck."

"It would have made a dandy reel fight," Gordon told him. "You're welcome to my place the next time we have a run in with those fellows. Give me the natives."

"I believe I'll take the sharks," Jim laughed. "There aren't so many of them."

They watched for several minutes but the body of the other fish did not appear and Jim decided that maybe it wasn't dead. "But it'll be some time before he feels like tackling a diver again," he chuckled.

"Guess I'd better get this suit off and start fixing it," Gordon declared. "It's going to take some patching to make that hold water," he added, pointing to a ragged tear nearly a foot in length.

"It's a pretty bad one," Slim agreed shaking his head, "but I've got some stuff that'll make it as good as new in a jiffy. I'll get it."

He disappeared into the cabin and was back in a moment with some strips of canvas and a

bottle of cement which he told them was made for that particular purpose.

"It won't look quite so pretty but it'll be just as strong as ever," he assured them as he set to work.

"Well, there never was anything very pretty about it in the first place," Jim chuckled as he watched him.

"That's according to the way you look at it," Slim retorted as he spread a thick coating of the cement on the canvas. "It's worked pretty well so far anyhow," he added.

"I'll say yes to that," Jim assured him.

"And I'll add that the suit is all right in every particular," Gordon declared. "Who ever heard of a diving suit made to look pretty anyhow?"

"I guess you both win," Jim laughed. "Hello, I believe our dusky friends are doing some patching on their own account. Wait till I get the glass."

He was back in a minute and for a short time he studied the shore through the powerful field glass.

"Yep," he announced, handing the glass to Slim, "they're patching it up all right."

"Let 'em patch it," Slim said. "It's evidently the only one they've got and that's some satisfaction."

"I believe that we could smash that one," Gordon mused as Slim handed him the glass.

"How?" Jim demanded.

"Get a big rock and then when they launch it fly over it and drop the rock in it. How about it?"

"Not so bad," Slim told him.

"I really believe it's worth trying," Jim added.

"Then let's take the plane and fly over behind that jut and get a couple of rocks. We can get back long before any of them could get out here even if they had a canoe."

They were quick to put the plan into execution and inside of a half hour they were back on the boat with three good-sized rocks in the plane.

"Now they'll most likely put it into the water to see if it's tight," Gordon told them, "and when they do we'll give them a little surprise party."

Looking through the glass Jim could see that the natives were still busy but he judged from

their actions that they were nearly through and said as much to Slim and Gordon. "They'll have it done in about a minute, but will they put it in the water?"

"That's just what they're going to do," Gordon announced a few minutes later as he handed the glass back to Jim.

"Come on then, let's get going," Slim cried as he began pulling the plane toward the boat.

"Better let me take the wheel and you get in back with the rocks," Gordon suggested.

"How come?" Jim asked.

"Your aim with a rock is better than mine," Gordon told him as he climbed over the side and took his place behind the wheel. "Slim, you get in front here with me."

As the plane rose from the water they could see that the natives, about six in number, were carrying the canoe down to the edge of the water and there was little doubt as to their intention.

"Hope they don't all get in it," Jim said.

"Why not?" Gordon asked him in some surprise.

"I might hit one of them."

"It wouldn't make me feel bad if you hit all of them," Gordon told him.

By this time Gordon had started the forward propeller and the plane, at an elevation of about a thousand feet, began to move toward the shore. He did not shut off the elevator entirely and the plane was making only about ten miles an hour when the natives shoved the canoe into the water. To Jim's satisfaction only two of them embarked, one in the bow and the other in the stern. Both had paddles and a moment later the canoe was moving rapidly through the water about a hundred feet out from the shore and parallel to it.

"Better get down a bit," Jim advised. "I don't believe I can hit it from this distance."

"Down it is," Gordon flung back as he pulled slightly on the stick. "How's this?" he asked a moment later.

"I'd get her down to about a hundred feet by the time we get there," Jim told him. "Even then it's going to take a mighty lucky shot to hit them."

By this time they were about half way to the shore and it was evident that the two natives in the canoe had seen them for they were turn-

ing and making for the spot where their companions were gathered.

"Better speed her up a bit or they'll get in before we reach them," Slim warned, and Gordon pulled the lever over a couple of notches.

The paddlers were exerting all their strength and the light craft was rushing through the water at a great speed when the plane passed over it. The elevator was still revolving slowly and Gordon now speeded it up a bit as he slowed down the forward propeller. The plane was a bit more than a hundred feet from the water and the canoe was about twice that distance from the shore when, by skillful handling, Gordon brought it directly over the small craft. Jim was standing in the back, one of the rocks in his two hands, ready for the drop when the right second came.

Splash!

"Missed it by a mile," he snapped as he quickly picked up another rock.

Splash!

"Can you beat it?"

There was but one rock left and he knew that

he must count with it or the plan would be a failure, and he waited, this last time, until he was sure that he could make a hit. And he did make it. Right in the middle of the canoe between the two men the rock struck and went through the bottom as though there had been no bottom, making a large ragged hole nearly a foot in diameter.

"Good boy," Gordon chuckled.

"I'll say that was a bullseye," Slim added.

Looking over the side he could see that the two men were in the water which was about up to their necks and were wading toward the shore dragging the remains of the canoe with them.

"It'll take them some time to fix that hole," Gordon declared as he headed the plane toward the little group of natives who were still standing on the shore looking at the plane.

"What you going to do?" Jim asked.

"Give 'em a scare," Gordon told him.

"Be careful."

By way of answer Gordon pointed the nose of the plane at a downward angle and pulled the lever over almost to full speed, and the light

plane darted forward like a thing alive. Straight toward the natives it flew and for a moment they stood their ground seemingly hypnotized. But when the plane was but a few yards away one of them, with a wild yell of terror, turned and fled and the others quickly followed him. Gordon made the plane swoop down and turn upward so that it missed one of them by not more than a couple of feet. And on the upward turn it missed the edge of the woods by not much more.

"Can't say that I blame you, but it was a fool stunt," Jim told him as he swung around in a wide turn.

"I sure thought we were going to crash first on the ground and then into the trees," Slim gasped.

"I didn't," Gordon told him. "I guess you fellows didn't think I knew how to handle this buggy, eh?"

"No, I didn't think that," Jim assured him. "I knew you could handle it but you shaved it pretty close."

"A miss is as good as a mile," Gordon chuckled as the plane swept out over the water.

"Well, I only hope it will teach them to let us alone," Slim said.

"But it won't," Jim told him.

"You don't think so?"

"No, and you don't either."

"Maybe not. I only said I hoped."

"Well, all I've got to say is that the day has started in fairly well when it comes to adventures," Gordon told them as he shut off the forward propeller and started the elevator. "We may get some excitement before night," he added as the plane landed on the water close behind the *Betty Ann*.

"I'll be satisfied to call it a day so far as adventure is concerned right now," Slim told him.

"It's all on the laps of the gods," Jim smiled as he climbed over the side of the plane to the boat.

"Anybody going down again before dinner?" Slim asked.

"Sure," Jim told him. "It's only a little after nine and I don't mind telling you that I'm in a hurry to get the job over with and to get away."

"Then that first trip doesn't count and I'm

going with you," Gordon declared as he began pulling on his suit.

"You'll be safe enough for a couple of hours," Jim said turning to Slim. "They won't be apt to swim out in the daylight."

"Or in the water," Gordon chuckled.

CHAPTER XV

AT WORK AGAIN

"Gee, but I do hope the sharks will let us alone for the rest of the time," Gordon declared as he thrust his head into his helmet.

"I hardly think we'll see any more to-day," Jim told him.

A moment later and they slipped into the water and Slim, leaning over the rail, watched them until they disappeared.

They found their crow-bars and pick-axes on the deck of the wreck where they had left them and at once began work with the bars. The axes might come in handy after they had succeeded in getting a hole through the planking but until then they were useless. They had kept a sharp watch as they came down but had seen nothing of their dreaded foes.

More than ever the conviction that the wreck was not the remains of the pirate ship took possession of Jim's mind as he tried in vain to

force an opening through the tough planks. Wood which had been in the water for so long a time could never be in the condition in which that deck was. Of that he was more and more certain. Still, he reasoned, there might well be something of value in the wreck and he had no thought of abandoning the enterprise if it was at all possible to force a way into the inside of the hull. But for fully a half hour they worked carefully testing each plank to find a weak spot through which they might force the end of the bar. Once get the end through and the rest would be comparatively easy for the resistance of the water would then be no serious disadvantage.

It was when they were about ready to give it up for the time being that Gordon, who was some twenty feet to the right of Jim, waved his arm motioning for him to join him. His bar had at last hit a soft spot between two of the planks and was imbedded for a distance of several inches. Gordon was dancing about making a most grotesque figure in his clumsy diving suit and Jim had to catch him by the arm to make him keep still.

Gordon, after the display of his feelings,

grabbed hold of the bar and motioned for Jim to help him. Together they exerted their strength and slowly but surely the tough plank gave way and finally a piece split off making a hole large enough to insert a hand and about eighteen inches long. It was the beginning but both boys knew that hours of hard work would be necessary before they could make a hole large enough to admit their bodies. Jim got down on his knees and made a careful examination of the edges of the planks and found that they were very sound.

He knew that they had been down long enough and indicated the fact to Gordon who nodded his head in agreement.

"Any success?" was Slim's greeting as they pulled off their helmets a few minutes later.

"I'll tell the world," Gordon told him.

"We got one of the bars through," Jim added.

"Huh, where do you get that we stuff?" Gordon snorted indignantly.

"You got a bar through," Jim amended.

"That's better," Gordon told him. "But it's going to take some work before one of us can get through," he added.

"Himself?" Slim asked.

"What d'you mean himself?" Gordon demanded, a puzzled look on his face. He was never quite certain when Slim was kidding.

"Why, you said it would take a lot of work before one of us could get through, didn't you?"

"Sure I did, and you said himself. Now do you mean get through himself or get himself through or what the dickins do you mean?"

"Sure I do," Slim told him as he disappeared through the door of the cabin. "Dinner'll be ready in two minutes," he called back.

"Now I wonder if he was trying to kid me?" Gordon mused out loud.

"How can you think such a thing?" Jim laughed.

"I guess he was, all right, but I'll get even with him sooner or later."

"I'll bet you will."

"Anyhow, I hope he wasn't kidding about dinner because I'm hungrier than I ever was before."

"How strange."

Slim, much to Gordon's delight, did not keep them waiting and, what was even better, he had an especially good dinner consisting, among other things, of some small fish which he had

caught using small bits of canned meat for bait. They were, Gordon declared, almost as good as Maine trout.

"Of course I know you don't mean that," Slim told him, "but thanks for the compliment just the same."

"No fish in the world is as good as a trout from a brook in Maine," Gordon declared.

"Hope I'll get a chance to try one sometime," Slim said as he helped Gordon to another fish.

"You will before you're many days older," Jim broke in.

"Meaning?"

"That you're going back home with us as soon as we get through with this job."

"Well, now, that—"

"You heard me," Jim interrupted.

"I know but—"

"Didn't Jim tell you that you heard him?" It was Gordon who interrupted this time.

"You win," Slim laughed.

"Now, after we get cleaned up," Jim said as they finished the last of the fish, "we've got to find something that we can use for a fulcrum on that job."

"What's a fulcrum?" Slim demanded.

"I mean we've got to have something that we can lay across that hole to rest the crow-bar on so that we can get a better leverage," Jim explained.

"Such as what?"

"Well, a piece of two by three about six feet long would answer," Jim told him.

"Haven't got one on board," Slim said promptly. "This is a boat, not a lumber yard."

"But we've got to have something," Gordon insisted.

"Why not use the other crow-bar?" Slim suggested.

"Just the thing," Jim told him. "Gee, but it must be great to have a head on your shoulders."

"I'll tell the world it is," Gordon declared, giving Slim a hearty slap on the back. "I'd never have thought of that in the world."

"Well, now that's settled, let's get a move on and wash up," Jim suggested. "I want to get back and get the job over with."

"Maybe, but you're going to stay up here this time. It's your turn to watch the boat," Gordon reminded him.

"I guess you're right," Jim agreed. "Then you two get at it and I'll do the dishes."

Fifteen minutes later Slim and Gordon were standing on the wreck and Gordon pointed with much pride at the hole he had made. They at once set to work and soon Slim realized that Gordon had been right when he had said that it was going to be a long job to enlarge the hole enough to permit of the passage of their bodies. The wood was very solid and the planks fully two inches thick and with both of them leaning their full weight on the bar the plank would not give. After working desperately for several minutes Gordon straightened up and shook his head.

Nodding in reply Slim picked up the other bar and began hunting for another soft spot. But he met with no success and after some time he suggested by motioning that they try it again. This time each used a bar making the side of the hole act as a fulcrum. This proved to be more successful and they managed to chip off several bits of wood and at the end of a half hour of steady work they had widened the opening by a couple of inches.

Another half hour passed and they had added

another inch to the width of the hole. Then Gordon signalled that it was time to go up. At first Slim shook his head but when Gordon insisted he gave in and followed him to the surface. They found Jim sitting on the deck reading a book but keeping an eye on the shore. But he told them that there had been no sign of a native.

"How'd you make out?" he asked as soon as they had stripped off the diving suits.

"Not so hot," Gordon told him. "That wood is tougher than a step-mother's heart. Oh, we did manage to break off a few splinters but at the rate we're going it'll take till Christmas to get a hole big enough to crawl through."

"And I can't say I want to stay here that long," Slim added.

"If I'd had sense enough to have brought along a big auger we'd have been through it long ago," Jim told them.

"Then what's the matter with going after one right now?" Gordon demanded. "There's plenty of time before it gets dark."

"Just what I was thinking," Jim told him. "What do you say, Slim?"

"Go by all means. I wonder that no one thought of it before."

"Well, we can't all be smart," Jim said as he got up and, walking back to the stern, began pulling the plane in. "I'll get back, if nothing happens, by supper time, and you two want to see that it's a good one."

"We'll do that," they both promised in the same breath.

Gordon and Slim watched the plane until it was lost in the distance and then, taking chairs on the side of the boat toward the shore, they began to talk. This was a pastime they always found interesting and the time passed rapidly until it was time to start getting supper.

"We've still got a couple of cans of chicken and I guess some waffles with them will suit the boss all right," Slim said as he got up and stretched himself.

"If it doesn't he ought to go hungry," Gordon told him.

"Especially as I'm the champion waffle maker of Cuba."

"You're building up quite a reputation for yourself and if you don't make good you'll regret it."

"It's my risk. You get the cans of chicken and I'll start the waffles. It's half-past five and Jim ought to be showing up any minute now."

But a half hour later, when the table was all set and the waffles were all ready to put on the iron, there was no sign of the plane. Neither of the boys was worried, although they had expected Jim to get back before six o'clock, for they realized that many things could happen to delay him for a short time. But when another thirty minutes passed and still there was no sign of the plane Gordon began to get a bit uneasy and Slim was plainly worried.

"It beats the dickins what's keeping him," Gordon said for about the tenth time, as he paced back and forth on the little deck.

"Oh, I guess he'll be showing up pretty soon," Slim encouraged. "Probably he's had trouble in finding an auger."

"Maybe, but I don't like it. Jim usually gets back about the time he says he's going to."

"You know, I hate to feel helpless," Slim broke out just before seven o'clock.

"So do I," Gordon agreed. "Here we are and there's no knowing what's happened to Jim and we can't do a thing."

"Except wait here and twiddle our thumbs."

"If he doesn't show up pretty soon I'll have to do something but I don't know for the life of me what it'll be. Do you suppose he's had trouble with the plane?"

"One guess is as good as another. Of course there's any number of things that might have happened."

Another half hour went by and the clock in the cabin struck seven. Gordon was pacing nervously up and down the deck watching the sky while Slim, a bit less nervous, managed to keep fairly quiet in his chair. The sun was well down toward the horizon and they knew that before long it would be dark.

Suddenly Gordon snatched up the glass which was on the deck beside Slim's chair.

"See him?" Slim demanded, jumping to his feet.

"Thank God, he's coming," Gordon replied, the glass still held to his eyes. "And maybe he isn't hitting it up."

"All I've got to say is that he's got some explaining to do," Slim grinned as he started for the galley. "I'll get a waffle on and you be ready

to sit down when I call whether he's here or not."

He disappeared and Gordon stood in the stern watching the plane which was now only a few miles away and rapidly coming nearer. He was trembling for he had not realized how anxious he had been and as the plane hovered overhead and finally settled down on the water close behind the boat he thanked God that his brother was safe.

"You've given us a pretty scare," he declared as Jim climbed from the plane to the boat.

"I was afraid you'd be worried but I got back as soon as I could. You'd hardly believe it but I guess I got the only thing in the shape of a boring instrument on the whole island. They didn't have a thing at either of the stores and I had to make what amounted almost to a house to house canvass before I found one and then I had to pay ten dollars for it and it isn't worth more than fifty cents," he explained as he handed Gordon an old rusty auger.

"It's pretty punk—"

"Stow the chatter and come to supper," Slim interrupted calling from the cabin. "Well,

what you got to say for yourself?" he demanded as Jim entered followed by Gordon.

"I was just explaining to Gordon that they didn't have one at the stores and I had to hunt around and—"

"All right, all right, get one of those waffles under your belt before it gets cold and forget it."

"The waffle?"

"No, the excuses. You had us scared out of a year's growth. If you hadn't come about when you did I'd have had to tie the kid to keep him from jumping overboard and trying to swim to the island to find you."

"Nothing happened while I was gone?" Jim asked his mouth full of chicken.

"Plenty, but it didn't amount to anything.

"What was it?"

"I developed thirty-six gray hairs and Gordon wore out a lot of perfectly good shoe leather," Slim told him.

"No sign of the natives?"

"Nary a sign."

"I rather think they've given us up as a bad job," Gordon suggested.

"I hope you're right," Slim told him, "but I

doubt it. They won't give up all those canoes so easily and don't you forget it."

"I agree with you," Jim said, "And that's why we want to get through and get away. I don't like the idea of none of them appearing on the shore there all day. Looks as though they were up to something."

"I think it would be a good plan to pull up anchor after dark and move out a few miles," Slim suggested.

"Just what I was thinking and we'll do it," Jim declared.

It was rapidly getting dark by the time supper was over and the dishes washed and soon after they pulled up the anchor and started the engine. They ran it very slowly so as to make as little sound as possible. Not that they thought any of the natives would hear it but there was a possibility and they did not want to take any chances. Slowly the boat swung around and moved out toward the open sea, dragging the plane and the flotilla of canoes after it. They continued for a half hour when Jim suggested that they had gone far enough and shut off the ignition.

"We've come four or five miles and they'll

never find us without a boat," he told them as Gordon let down the anchor.

"But we're going to keep a watch just the same to-night, aren't we?" Slim asked from the door of the pilot house.

"Certainly we are, but I reckon one at a time will be enough," Jim told him.

"Who'll take the first watch?" Gordon asked.

"You want it?"

"Doesn't make any difference."

"All right with you, Slim?"

"Sure."

CHAPTER XVI

CONCLUSION

The night passed with no alarm. Gordon watched until midnight, although he was supposed to call Jim at eleven o'clock and was soundly scolded for not obeying orders. At three o'clock Jim called Slim and in turn was soundly berated for not calling him at two as he was supposed to do. They had an early breakfast and then started back to their former mooring where they found the buoy undisturbed.

"I'd give thirteen cents to know whether or not any of those guys were prowling around out here last night," Gordon said as he let down the anchor.

"You might go ask them," Jim told him.

It was Gordon's turn to stay on the boat and just as the clock struck eight Jim and Slim disappeared over the side of the boat. The auger, although badly rusted, had been sharpened with

a file by Jim the night before and he had little doubt but that he could bore through the planks without much trouble. But he found it harder work than he had anticipated and it took him all of fifteen minutes to make the first hole. Still it was better than working with the bar and he was not discouraged as he handed it to Slim and indicated where he was to make the second hole. Slim had to lean on the tool with about all his weight in order to make it cut and Jim watched anxiously for fear it would snap in two. But it held and finally the second hole, a few inches from the first, was through.

Taking turns they worked as rapidly as possible and at the end of an hour and a half had eight holes through the plank and Jim suggested, by means of motions, that they take the bars and try to break the piece out.

Using one of the bars as a fulcrum they pried with the other and after changing position several times the plank gave way and at last before them yawned a hole large enough to admit a human body. With their goal at hand the two boys stood and gazed at the opening and each knew that the other was wondering what would be found on the inside of the wreck. Jim had

said no word to either Slim or Gordon regarding his doubts as to the identity of the wreck and he wondered if the same thought had occurred to them.

For perhaps three minutes they hesitated, then Jim, pulling his waterproof flashlight from his pocket, motioned to Slim to stay where he was, and the next minute had disappeared through the hole. It was pitch dark as his feet touched the bottom of the hull and his light did but little to dispel the gloom. Still it gave light enough to enable him to see a yard or so in front of him and he stood still and turned it in all directions. But there was nothing to be seen within the radius of the rays and he began slowly to walk toward the stern.

He had taken but a few steps when he was brought up by a partition and had to fumble for a moment before finding the door as it was well over on the right side. And when he found it he was no better off for it was swelled so tightly shut that he was unable to make the slightest impression on it. This did not greatly discourage him for he believed that with a crowbar it would not be difficult. So he turned and,

with the aid of the light, explored the room all around.

So near as he could judge the room was about thirty feet long and reached nearly the entire width of the ship. There was absolutely nothing in the room and after making sure of it he returned to the spot directly beneath the hole and, inflating his suit, was soon beside Slim on the deck. In reply to Slim's gesture he shook his head and indicated that it was time for them to go up. He greatly wanted to go on back with a bar and make the attack on the door but he knew that Gordon would be worried if they remained much longer.

As was to be expected Gordon began slinging questions at them almost before they were on board.

"Did you get a hole through? Did you get inside? Did you find anything? Did you—"

"Back up," Jim laughed as he pulled off his helmet. "One at a time: you're rocking the boat."

"But did you—?"

"Sure we did," Slim interrupted.

"Did what?" Gordon demanded.

"Everything you asked except find something."

"There wasn't anything there?" Gordon asked his disappointment visible in his face.

"We don't know yet," Jim told him and proceeded to tell him what had happened. "So you see,'" he finished, "we don't know anything more than we did before we went down and we won't know anything more till we get that door open."

"You think we can do it with a crow-bar?"

"Sure we can."

"Then come on, what are you waiting for? It's Slim's turn up here."

"Give me ten minutes to get my breath," Jim laughed. "We've got plenty of time to finish the job to-day I reckon."

"Never can tell about time here," Gordon advised.

"Now, it's my idea that the safest way will be for but one of us to go into the hull at a time while the other stands watch on the deck," Jim suggested when the ten minutes were nearly up.

"I suppose you're afraid a cop might come

along and pinch us for breaking and entering," Gordon laughed.

"No, but something might happen in that hull that would prevent us from getting out," Jim reminded him. "Oh, I don't know what it could be but—"

"Have it your own way," Gordon interrupted. "Who's going to be the one to stay outside and watch for the cop?"

"I think I'd better go in as I know right where that door is."

"And of course no one else could find it. But I'll stay on the outside."

"Thanks. Now let's get down and if we have any luck we'll be up with the treasure in less than an hour and then we can return the canoes and say good-bye."

"Keep your eye on the anchor rope," Slim cautioned just as they were about to put on the helmets. "I don't know why but I've got a hunch that our friends over there have been up to something and will pay us a visit, or try to, before the day's over. If you see me pull up the anchor come a running."

"We'll do that little thing," Gordon promised. "But I think you're getting fussed up for

nothing. I don't see how they can do anything."

A few minutes later Jim was again slipping through the hole, this time with one of the bars in his hand. With the aid of his flash he found the door without difficulty and at once began the attack on it. He was obliged to work in pitch darkness as he could not hold the light and use the bar at the same time, but as he had anticipated, the door offered but little resistance to the blows with the end of the bar and it was but a few minutes when one of the panels split and after that it was easy work enlarging the opening.

The room in which he found himself after stepping through the doorway was much smaller than the one he had just left and had evidently been used as a store-room, for many boxes of all sizes filled more than half the space. It was not likely, he thought, that there would be anything in the shape of treasure in such a place and, holding his light before him, he made his way across the room and soon located another door. Fortunately this one was not closed tight and a strong shove pushed it open and admitted him to a third room considerably smaller

than the second. Indeed it was hardly larger than the average state-room.

But it had been used as a cabin for some officer of the ship he felt certain from the looks of the furniture and he decided to make a thorough search there before going further. On one side of the room was a heavy bunk and on the other an old fashioned desk with several drawers. He knew before he tried that it would be a hopeless task to get any of the drawers open but he tried them all. He was about to turn and cross over for a look beneath the bunk when he saw something lying on the floor by the side of the desk which caught the light from the flash and reflected it back. He stooped and picked up a twenty dollar gold piece. Eagerly he held it in front of the lens of his helmet and directed the rays from his flash on it. 1886 was the date stamped on it and he gave a low chuckle. He had been right in his surmise and the ship had surely been there less than forty-three years, probably much less.

He carefully examined the floor about the desk and even moved it out so that he could see beneath it but that one piece of gold was all he found. But he had better luck when he peeped

under the bunk, for as he flashed his light, he saw, off in one corner, a chest of metal. He was obliged to lie at full length on the floor in order to reach it and had to exert about all his strength to pull it out. It was about two feet long by a foot wide and a foot high and weighed, he judged, some hundred pounds. Of course the buoyancy of the water made it seem considerably lighter. Still it was a good load as he carried it back through the middle room and into the one he had first entered.

He doubted if he would be able to get it up through the hole by inflating his suit even to its fullest extent and the trial proved that his fear was well founded. So he left it and rose quickly through the ten or twelve feet of water and found Gordon standing close by the hole. Motioning that he would be back as soon as possible he floated on up and as soon as he had reached the surface, made for the boat only a few feet away.

"Found something?" Slim greeted him as he removed his helmet.

"Sure have," he told him. It's a chest and looks as though it might contain something valuable. Get me that coil of rope in the front

locker and make it snappy or Gordon'll think something's wrong."

Slim was back in a minute with the coil of rope which was about the size of ordinary clothesline, and telling him that they would be up again in a few minutes, Jim screwed on his helmet and started down. He found Gordon waiting and without stopping to explain, he sank through the hole. To attach the line to the chest was the work of but a moment and soon he again stood on the deck and was drawing the chest up. Gordon was much excited as he evidenced by dancing about and as the chest hove in view he grasped it and pulled it onto the deck.

At that moment Jim happened to glance around and to his surprise saw the anchor rope twitching violently. It was, he realized, Slim's signal that something was wrong, and he grabbed Gordon by the arm and indicated that they must lose no time. His own suit was already partly inflated as he had let out only a portion of the air, and Gordon quickly turned on the air in his suit. It seemed to both that the suits were unusually long in filling up but in reality it was only a moment before they

were rising toward the surface, Jim uncoiling the line as he went up.

As their heads bobbed from the water they turned toward the boat and saw that Slim was pulling up the anchor with all the haste he could muster, and as they glanced around they saw the reason. Coming toward the boat was a fleet of not less than twenty canoes and each was filled with natives. They were still some distance off but the boys could see, even from the water, that they were rapidly pushing their light craft through the water and realized that there was no time to lose.

"We've got about ten minutes, I'd say," Slim greeted them as they came over the side of the boat. "You got the chest tied fast?"

Jim had his helmet off first and assured Slim that the chest was at the other end of the line. Hand over hand they began pulling it in and all the time the canoes were coming on at what seemed to them an ever increasing speed. It was soon evident that the estimate of ten minutes was too long as the nearest of the canoes was only a few rods away and the chest was not yet in sight.

"Start the engine," Jim ordered over his

shoulder, and Gordon hurried to the engine-room while Jim and Slim continued to pull in the line.

What if the engine failed to start? flashed through Jim's mind. But a moment later a hum from behind him told him that that fear was not to be realized and the boat began to move just as the chest came in sight down through the green water.

"Just a minute till I get a hold of it," Jim said as he climbed over the side of the boat and went down the few rungs of the ladder.

But now the nearest canoe was only a few yards away and was driving directly toward him and he saw that it was going to reach him before he could lift the chest from the water and get it up over the side. The natives were yelling lustily as they saw that they were to reach the boat before it could get away. But they reckoned without a full knowledge of Slim's expediency. That individual had already taken a hitch of the line about a cleat and had grabbed up the anchor, the only heavy loose object in sight, and just as the native in the bow of the canoe was about to grab hold of Jim he let it fly through the air.

That anchor was heavy and he afterward confessed that he did not believe he could have done it had he stopped to think about it. But he did do it and the heavy piece of iron struck the canoe squarely on the side and about midway between the two ends, and over it went. Meanwhile the boat was gathering speed and was out of reach before any one of the maddened natives could reach it.

"Talk about the skin of your teeth," Jim panted as he pulled the chest over the side of the boat aided by Slim.

"Not a bad shot that," Slim chuckled as he began pulling in the anchor.

The boat rapidly gained speed and soon the natives were hopelessly out of the race although the boys could still hear their wild yells of baffled fury.

"Better cut those canoes loose," Jim advised as he turned the wheel a bit to the left. "We don't want them." He was in the pilot-house and spoke to Gordon who had just appeared in the doorway.

"Why not take them out a few miles and let them have a good long paddle for them if they want them?" Gordon grinned.

"Because we're not going to," Jim told him with a significant smile.

"Certainly we're not," Gordon responded as he drew his knife from his pocket, and a moment later Jim heard him mutter: "Now come and get 'em, you poor beggars, but I'll be hanged if you deserve them."

An hour later the three were together in the little cabin. They had stopped the engine and let down the anchor and were gathered for what Gordon called a meeting of the committee of the whole.

"The first thing to do," Slim began, "is to get that chest open and see what we've drawn."

"Just a minute," Jim held up his hand. "I want to say a word before we do it. You know, I haven't said anything about it, but the fact is I've been pretty certain for some time that that wasn't the wreck of that pirate ship at all."

"How come?" Gordon demanded.

"For several reasons," Jim told him. "In the first place those timbers in the deck were too sound to have been in the water that long."

"You may be right at that," Slim told him.

"I'm absolutely certain I am," Jim smiled.

"How come?" Gordon again asked.

"In answer Jim pulled the gold piece from his pocket and handed it to his brother. "Look at the date on that," he told him.

"Hum, I suppose you're going to say that you found it in the wreck," Gordon said as he in turn handed it to Slim.

"Exactly," Jim assured him.

"Then, of course, that settles it," Slim declared as he handed the coin back to Jim. "I don't suppose it's common sense to think that someone left it there after the ship went down."

"Hardly," Jim smiled. "I wanted you to understand that it wasn't the pirate ship before we opened the chest so that you wouldn't be so disappointed if there's nothing of value in it."

"It's heavy enough to contain a lot of valuable stuff," Slim reminded him.

"Iron washers, perhaps," Gordon suggested.

"Well, we won't find out by talking about it," Slim declared. "Just a minute till I get some tools and we'll see what's what."

It took them nearly half an hour to force the lid as it was of very heavy brass, but it finally flew up and they eagerly peeped in. The inside of the chest was perfectly dry and as they

saw the contents their eyes bulged with amazement. For it was empty save for a small box of the most beautiful wood they had ever seen. This box was fastened by some kind of glue to the bottom of the chest and Jim was obliged to pull with nearly all his strength to get it loose.

"No wonder the chest is so heavy," he declared. "Those sides must be all of two inches thick."

The box was about six inches long by three wide and a little more than four inches high. The lid was fastened with a small padlock which appeared to be of gold, but the key was not in the chest and they saw that it would have to be forced.

"Best way will be to file the lock off," Slim suggested. "It would be a crime to mar that wood. I'll get a file and it won't take long."

But the staple was of very hard steel and it took the better part of another half hour to cut through it with the file. But it was finally accomplished and all seemed to hold their breath as Jim lifted the lid.

"Great guns and little fishes," Slim gasped as his eyes fell on the most beautiful collection of gems he had ever seen.

The bottom of the box was thickly lined with cotton and on it rested a large handful of jewels; diamonds, opals, rubies and others.

"Gee, but if they're real there's a fortune there," Gordon declared.

"I guess they're real all right," Jim told him. "No one would be likely to put a lot of imitations in a chest like that. I don't see any sign of a paper or any writing."

The gems were turned out on the table and the lining removed but there was nothing in the box to give a hint as to whom the gems belonged or a clue to the name of the ship.

"But they may not be the best grade," Slim cautioned. "But they look pretty good to me," he added picking up a few of them and holding them up to the light.

"Well, the next thing is to decide whether or not we're going back to make a more thorough search," Gordon said as Jim replaced the gems in the box.

"My vote is no," Jim declared in a tone which left no doubt as to its meaning.

"Same here," Slim agreed.

"But there may be something more valuable

even than what we've got here," Gordon objected.

"I doubt it," Jim told him. "Anyhow, those natives had begun to get on my nerves and I think we'd be very foolish to go back and take another chance. They got two of us and the third one would be I and I might not be so lucky. No, my advice is that we call it a job and go while the going's good."

"I suppose you're right," Gordon agreed, "and if we're going we might as well start."

"Right this minute," Jim smiled.

The return to Slim's home was uneventful and once near the city the boys lost no time in taking the gems to a reliable authority and having them valued. It took several hours for the man to go over the collection but when the work was done he made them an offer of fifty thousand dollars for the lot.

"You might get a little more in New York," he told them. "But only a few of the stones are of the first water."

Slim had assured Jim and Gordon that the man was not only an authority on stones but was thoroughly honest and after a brief consultation they decided to accept the offer pro-

vided he would allow each of them to keep a ruby for himself. These they wished to have set in rings to remind them of the adventure. To this the man readily agreed and they left the place soon after with the check safe in Jim's pocket-book.

"Not a bad summer's work, at that," Gordon declared as they reached the sidewalk.

"I'll tell the world," Slim agreed. "And think of the fun we had."

"Maybe," Jim told him. "But wait till we get up in the Maine woods and we'll show you what fun is, eh Gordon?"

"Maybe you didn't just say something," Gordon grinned. "Is the plane all right for an early start in the morning?"

"All ready and raring to go," Jim smiled.

THE END

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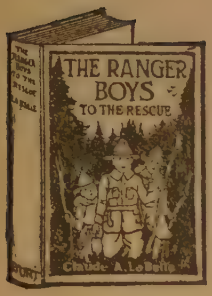

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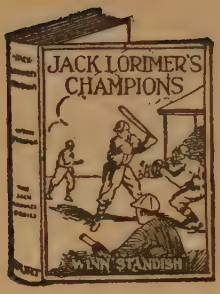

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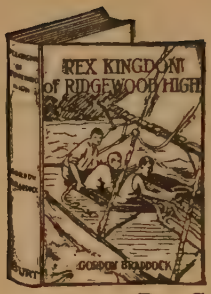

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